

ORT ALBANIA DEMOCRACY NETWORK PROGRAM

Quarterly Progress Report January - March 1997

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From the beginning of the quarter, ORT continued its proactive strategy in technical assistance and training. The strategy premise is to help NGOs build government-NGO partnerships, to increase the skills of NGOs in policy analysis, formulation, and advocacy, and to strengthen the institutional capacity of grantees and trainees. Throughout the crisis, ORT focused on responding to NGO need.

- The legislative process lacks transparency in Albania; there exists no formal procedure requiring the government to request and consider public comment. This lack of transparency and procedure was clearly illustrated to NGOs in a recent Ministry of Labor's initiative to draft a special licensing law to govern NGOs who provide social and employment services. In March, NGOs were outraged to learn that the Ministry of Labor was moving ahead with the initiative and had refused to discuss the draft or distribute it to NGOs for comment. To strengthen NGO response, ORT initiated the formation of an NGO coalition to analyze the current environment and serve as a representative voice in formulating an NGO policy position. Also in March, ORT with Democracy Network Programs regional partner, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), planned a workshop for NGOs and government to both open the process and assist NGOs and government in analyzing the needs of the sector and requisite protections for citizens receiving social and employment services.
- Although many Tirana-based NGOs and several NGOs located elsewhere have implemented previous donor-funded projects, NGOs' skills, if any, are rudimentary in the areas of project management, monitoring and evaluation, and program reporting. Through project implementation training this quarter, ORT is strengthening the institutional capacity of its grantees by training them in preparation of project workplans and budgets, strategic planning, and establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system to measure success, which includes collecting initial baseline data. As a result, DemNet grantees are able to more clearly define their strategic goals and objectives.
- From a review of the accounting and record-keeping systems of ORT grantees, it is obvious that very few have an organized and comprehensive system of project management. During the current and previous quarter, ORT has provided financial management training for grantees to assist them in developing a modern fund accounting system. Early results this quarter have shown that at least one-half of the trained grantees have already adopted this modern fund accounting system and are working to transform current systems. Overall, quarterly financial reports from grantees with the training show a noticeable improvement in that reports are more comprehensive and presented in a unified format, and management systems encompass the necessary supporting documentation and recording procedures.
- It is apparent from the grant applications received by ORT DemNet that Albanian NGOs

have little knowledge or skill in formulating and advocating policy issues to the government. With ORT instructed Albanian trainers, in January, ORT held its second round of Policy Advocacy training in Durres for NGOs in the economic growth sector and local and national governmental representatives. Training participants stated that the training was extremely useful because they learned basic skills for policy analysis and advocacy and gave them a clearer picture about their role as NGOs in a democratic society. These practical exercises also offered them a beneficial opportunity to meet government officials, to learn about the way they make policy decisions at the local and national level, and to establish helpful contacts for future endeavors.

- Local training capacity is slowly growing in Albania to support on-going NGO development and capacity building. During this quarter, ORT helped to broaden local training capacity by nominating six trainers for a US training of trainers program through P.I.E.T. The trainers prepared three training modules for immediate use in Albania in the areas of: (1) volunteer recruitment and management; (2) community needs assessment; and (3) fundraising. Next quarter, ORT intends to employ these trainers to instruct a broader corp of Albanian trainers throughout Albania.
- Albanian NGOs, and particularly ORT grantees, are actively addressing the current crisis. As the political and economic crisis developed during the quarter, ORT supported NGO initiatives, including peace marches, publications, and round tables. ORT also assisted NGOs in formulating important strategies in conflict resolution, economic policy related to the pyramid schemes, environmental and health protection, and NGO law development. New initiatives will be implemented in the upcoming quarter.

Current DemNet grantee reports demonstrate that the ORT-Albanian NGO partnership has been an effective force for change in a number of important areas.

- Prior to May 1996, the public and NGOs had little or no access to health educational facilities. Supported through a DemNet grant, the Health for All Foundation continues to offer public access to a health education resource library, to distribute health education publications, and to offer support and networking services to NGOs through its Health for All Center (HAC). During this quarter, the HAC restructured its program organization for improved project management and decision-making. ORT financial management and project implementation training provided to HAC significantly improved provisions in the new statute and the ability of staff to carry out new responsibilities. HAC also assisted the Health NGO Forum to make needed improvements to its statute and management structure and secure donor funding.
- Access to family planning services and information are severely limited in Albania. During the last quarter, the Albanian Family Planning Association (AFPA) used the remainder of its DemNet funds to hold a national seminar on reproductive rights, discussing concepts included in the draft law prepared by the Ministry of Health and AFPA. The national

seminar provided a necessary open forum for NGOs, government, medical professionals, and students to discuss important issues of the draft law and policy recommendations. AFPA is publishing the discussion and recommendations as supportive materials to use in lobbying government, Parliament, and in mobilizing NGO and public support for enactment of a law. This would ideally guarantee access to family planning advice, contraceptives, and safe reproductive health services.

- The Albanian government is currently preparing its National Platform of Action for Women, as agreed to at the United Nations' Beijing Conference on Women. During this quarter, the League of Albanian Anti-Communist Women (LAAW), as a part of their ORT funded project, presented policy recommendations prepared at its national roundtable. The Secretary of State on Women Issues agreed to work with LAAW to incorporate their recommendations to help solve remaining economic, social, and educational obstacles for former politically persecuted women.
- The recognition and respect for human rights in a post-Communist society presents a constant challenge to the Albanian society. Thus, the role of DemNet grantee, the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), is vital as a watch-dog organization. During the reporting quarter, AHC tackled a number of human rights issues centered around the final ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights, local elections, and AHC's fact-finding missions to the South and three Roma communities. AHC raised national and international attention to the states' attempt to circumvent its treaty obligations, its human rights violations, and the need for legislative reform. AHC also intervened on behalf of the Greek minority community in Delvina to persuade local education authorities to reopen Greek language classes for 17 ethnic Greek children. During the last quarter, AHC instituted needed organizational improvements as a result of ORT technical assistance. AHC is now better equipped to respond to incoming complaints and to monitor human rights situations.
- Important cross-border environmental issues arise in a small country like Albania. The Association for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment (PPNEA), under an ORT grant, continues to work with its Macedonian and Greek counterparts to sponsor the first international consortium on sharing development of a joint protective policy for the Prespa Lakes. In January, PPNEA as host of the conference, delivered invitations and requests for papers to representatives of government, academic institutions, and NGOs in the country. However, due to the current conditions, this important conference had to be postponed until the situation is stable in Korca, Albania.
- In contrast to the rapidly changing economic conditions in Albania, the environmental movement is emerging slowly. Through an ORT grant, the Biologists Association has increased the focus and support for curriculum reform from educational authorities. The Biologists Association trained 138 teachers in modern training techniques, and as a result local educational directorates have introduced the teaching materials in the curriculum, and monitored the implementation of "green ideas" into all academic subjects. The Biologists Association is lobbying the national government to permanently adopt the new materials and

methods, as well as its other policy recommendations to support environmental education of middle and high school students.

- Reports of drug overdose and an increase in alcohol abuse by teenagers reveals a new and growing problem in Albania. However, no comprehensive study exists on measurement and consequence. Supported by an ORT grant, Useful to Albanian Women (UAW) won the support of two high schools, parent and teachers, and the relevant government agencies for research work of its Monitoring Center on Drug and Alcohol Abuse this quarter. Both schools agreed to hold a "Drug Week" in which UAW can conduct its survey, show educational films, distribute material, and hold discussions on drug abuse. At one high school, a group of parents, teachers, and students have already formed an association to work with UAW. Government officials within the newly formed National Committee on Drugs supports UAW as a partner in policy formation and provided a support letter addressed to the Secondary Education Department to authorize access to local high schools.
- A majority of the youth associations in Albania operate in Tirana and Shkodra. Nevertheless, there is great potential in other university cities for youth motivation and social volunteerism. During this quarter, the Albanian Youth Council's (AYC) newly created coordination centers in Korca and Gjirokaster sponsored several large youth events, supported by local municipalities and businesses. AYC in the last quarter helped young people and members of youth NGOs to work together on common activities, addressing health issues, environmental protection, and fundraising needs. The AYC regional coordination center successfully lobbied the Secretary of State on Youth Issues to designate funds to local government, to support NGO initiatives as part of the 1997 state budget. In addition, the AYC regional coordination center increased communication and capacity building, in relation to its branches, by initiating monthly reporting procedures and joint program planning.
- The socialized public health care system in Albania is intended to guarantee free and appropriate health care to all Albanian citizens, but the reality is different. Often, doctors ask for payment for services, and the medical profession and hospitals are rarely held accountable for medical negligence or mistake. Under an ORT grant, the Albanian Patients Association drafted a "Charter of Patients' Rights." During this quarter, the Albanian Patients Association presented its charter to the Ministry of Health, which is currently drafting legislation incorporating the patients rights. The Patients Associations is lobbying the Ministry to adopt the charter to replace existing inconsistent hospital rules on treatment of patients.
- Approximately 23,000 persons in Albania are temporarily or permanently incapacitated due to accidents caused in the workplace. The Humanitarian Association of Labor Invalids, an ORT grantee, represents the rights and interests of labor invalids. During this quarter, the Labor Invalids Association produced and distributed 12,000 labor invalid identification cards which enable labor invalids to obtain benefits, such as pensions, tax exemptions, reduced fair for travel and entry to sport and cultural events. In addition, through the ORT grant and ORT

financial management training, the Labor Invalids made this initiative self-sustainable, alleviating future need for donor funds to support production of the identity cards.

- After the broad international criticism of the May national parliamentary elections, the local elections in October became a critical test for Albanian democracy. The Society for Democratic Culture used its DemNet grant to fund television and radio broadcasts on voting procedures and voter responsibility. Although the state television and the Permanent Central Election Commission ultimately and illegally refused to allow the Society for Democratic Culture air its broadcasts, the radio broadcasts were heard by a large portion of the population. The Society's local chapters said the broadcasts greatly boosted the recognition and respect for their work. Persons interviewed, including various politicians, said the broadcasts sent a valuable message at a time when political parties were not able to send the same message during the political campaign. Ultimately, the local election process was quiet and without serious incidents.

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INTRODUCTION

Albania is currently facing a major political and economic crisis, which unfolded rapidly in the January-March 1997 quarter. As the crisis developed, the ORT Democracy Network Program worked together with NGOs to formulate initiatives to address the situation and encouraged Tirana-based NGOs to offer assistance and support to their counterparts in other cities and towns, some of whose offices were looted and burned. Albanian NGOs revised project implementation plans and postponed previously planned initiatives in order to immediately address the crisis and to alleviate some of its more serious consequences.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING

A number of NGOs have the unique opportunity to learn advocacy first-hand as they respond to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection's attempt to enact a new NGO law. To assist, ORT initiated the formation of an NGO coalition to respond to the draft legislation, and together with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), planned a joint workshop on legal issues related to the NGO initiative to take place in Budapest May 1-3, 1997.

ORT continued to provide financial management and program implementation training to strengthen institutional capacity, specifically for DemNet grantees. Early results show improved project management and reporting. In January, ORT conducted a four day seminar on policy analysis, formulation, and advocacy for NGOs working in the economic growth sector using ORT-trained local trainers. To further strengthen local training capacity, ORT nominated six NGO trainers to attend a US-based training of trainers (conducted through the USAID P.I.E.T. program).

Even after the March evacuation of ORT's American Project Director from Albania, the ORT program continued to provide critical support to the NGO community. The local ORT office became one of the primary communication hubs for Albanian NGOs to transmit faxes to foreign counterparts and donors, and ORT local staff organized roundtables and meetings to strategize an effective and active role for the NGO sector during the crisis.

Technical Assistance On the Draft NGO Law

In Albania, public participation in policy formulation has been successful in some instances. ORT highlights these success stories for government and the NGO sector during the "Building NGO-Government Partnerships" Conferences. Grantees have also provided input to the government that is being incorporated into new policy. Nevertheless, the legislative process lacks transparency; there exists no formal procedure requiring the government to request or consider public comment. These shortcomings remain evident in the Ministry of Labor's recent NGO law initiative.

As early as November 1996, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection began a legislative initiative to draft a law requiring NGOs which provide social and employment services to obtain a license first from the Ministry¹. Shortly thereafter, ORT and ICNL offered direct assistance to the Ministry in drafting the law and meeting with NGOs to discuss the need for legislation.

An initial workshop scheduled for December was abruptly canceled by the Minister the night before it commenced. Subsequently, the Ministry appeared disinterested in foreign technical assistance or a dialogue with NGOs. In February 1997, ORT was able to obtain an unofficial copy of the draft law, but the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection had not made it available to NGOs for comment [See attachment A.]

ORT, in cooperation with ICNL, planned a workshop for NGOs and government to be held March 5, as a means to open up the process and assist the parties in analyzing sectoral needs and requisite protections for citizens receiving social and employment services. To prepare for the workshop, ORT invited NGO participants to a meeting to discuss formation of an NGO drafting and review committee. Over 22 NGOs attended (ORT and ICNL participated via conference call), and they agreed to form a coalition to help lead the ORT/ICNL workshop and to draft and advocate policy recommendations based on the workshop needs assessment. The coalition group prepared a workplan outlining a full advocacy campaign, including holding a series town meetings to mobilize support for NGO recommendations. Due to the state of emergency, ORT/ICNL postponed the workshop until a later date. However, the coalition group with the assistance of ORT staff continue to monitor the status of the legislative initiative and oppose its enactment without a proper needs assessment and joint government-NGO dialogue.

Financial Management Training

¹Albanian NGOs and foreign donors are unsure whether the driving motivation behind the initiative is to allow a structure for the state to privatize some social and employment services, to set standards to control the safety and quality of public services, or to funnel donor and state funds to only those NGOs that the state licenses.

An initial review of DemNet applicants' and grantees' financial systems indicated that Albanian NGOs possess little, if any, financial management structure or policies.² In response, ORT designed financial management training course and trained three local trainers to conduct it. Round one grantees participated in the initial offering of the course in the previous quarter; during the January - March quarter, ORT trained another 13 DemNet grantees (21 representatives). The three day course for finance officers, program managers, and board members teaches methods for setting up a fund accounting system using a modern chart of accounts, preparing budgets, and includes a component on legal and fiscal obligations under Albanian law, and compliance with USAID financial record keeping and reporting requirements. The training is set up with time in between the initial two days of training and the final day, so that NGOs can prepare their own chart of accounts with project expenditures, donor funding sources, and income, and present it to their board members for approval and adoption.

The new Chief of the NGO department within the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Sofi Noti, participated as a trainee in the most recent ORT financial management course. She stated that she found the information extremely useful and a good model for all NGOs in Albania. The supportive participation of Ms. Noti is important because the new NGO law may include provisions governing financial reporting and auditing of NGOs. DemNet grantee representatives expressed their support for the model introduced by ORT, and discussed with Ms. Noti the need for legislative provisions to facilitate their work.

Early results from the previous quarter show that ORT training has significantly improved grantees' financial systems and reporting. ORT grantees, the Society for Democratic Culture, the Albanian Family Planning Association, the Health for All Foundation, and the Albanian Youth Council, have already adopted the modern fund accounting system and are working to transform current systems. Most submit quarterly financial reports to ORT which show a noticeable improvement. Reports are presented in a unified format and include cash on hand and cash in bank reconciliation reports. DemNet grantees have begun to use a voucher system for all expenditures and maintain supporting documentation. Two DemNet grantees changed finance officers, but the board members of both (who themselves were trained) had adopted the system and were eager to have ORT train the new finance officers. Training participants grasped the budgeting component of the training as well; all of the trainees were able to identify mistakes in sample budgets and suggest improvement.

² During the first grant round, ORT immediately offered individual training for each grantee to assist them in setting up a record keeping system based on the general accepted accounting principles and USAID rules for grantees. It was the first time for most of the DemNet grantees to use a cash receipts and cash disbursement book, a petty cash record, a bank records book, a voucher system, to keep time records for paid staff and equipment inventory lists, or to obtain receipts for all goods and services purchased and maintain them in a filing system.

Based on requests from DemNet grantees and the success of the training sessions, ORT will not only continue to train future DemNet grantees, but will teach non-grantees, train additional local trainers, and prepare a "User's Manual" on the modern fund accounting system and its chart of accounts.

Project Implementation Training

Despite the fact that many of the Tirana-based NGOs and a few NGOs in other cities have implemented other donor-funded projects, their skills, if any, are rudimentary in project management, monitoring and evaluation, and program reporting probably because former donors had not required reports or even receipts for expenditures. Although DemNet grantees agree that the DemNet planning and reporting requirements are initially arduous, most conclude that the skills they develop in implementation strengthen their NGO, its managers, staff and volunteers. DemNet grant agreements require institutional development and development activity grantees to submit: (1) workplans; (2) baseline data; (3) monitoring and evaluation plans; (4) quarterly financial reports; and (5) program reports identifying project impact and lessons learned. To assist grantees, ORT conducts regular meetings offering individual technical assistance, meets with NGOs after submission of quarterly reports (if revisions are necessary), and conducts mid-term and final evaluations to measure impact according to goals and indicators established early in the project.

In addition, ORT provides project implementation training to at least four representatives of each NGO. The participants work with ORT staff in preparing or revising project workplans and budgets; and discuss strategic planning and how to monitor and evaluate success, including collecting initial baseline data. ORT offers the course after projects have begun and grantees have gained a little experience in project implementation; this allows for a more concrete discussion, more clearly defined strategic objectives, and plans to achieve them. During this quarter, ORT trained nine DemNet grantees (19 representatives).

ORT project implementation training combined with mid-point and final evaluations strengthen program and institutional capacity of DemNet grantees. Early results show that grantees that have participated in the training adhere more closely to workplans, report more tangible project results and impact, and more often meet reporting deadlines.

Policy Advocacy Training

ORT's "Building NGO-Government Partnerships" conferences in the four priority sectors bring together government and NGOs to discuss policy issues and highlight successful examples of previous policy dialogue. ORT supports the national conferences through advocacy training for NGOs. In January, following the December "Building Partnerships in Economic Growth" conference, ORT trained ten NGOs (12 representatives) in policy advocacy, an area in which most Albanian NGOs have little knowledge or vision of their role. The four day training is designed to create and/or strengthen the public policy and advocacy skills of Albanian NGOs in order for them to constructively engage in the policy making, policy analysis, or policy implementation processes. NGOs working in the economic sector are few and most are only a year old; they have relatively little

organizational capacity or program experience. Nevertheless, a concern common to these groups is lobbying government for more favorable policy to business and agriculture.

The participants found the training extremely useful because they learned basic skills for policy analysis and for policy advocacy. In trainee evaluations, the participants stated that the training gave them a clearer picture about their role as NGOs in a democratic society, and that the practical exercises offered them an excellent opportunity to meet government officials, to learn about the way policy decisions are made at the local and national level, and to establish good contacts for future cooperation. By conducting the training in Albanian with ORT-trained Albanian trainers and in a workshop setting (including use of role playing and brainstorming exercises), the participants could discuss at length the meaning of new terms and concepts. The highlight of the training for participants was the visit to local government officials and to the local office of national government representatives. As the training was conducted in Durres, participants discussed policy process with the new Mayor, three Deputies of Parliament, the Prefect and the legal advisor of the Prefect. This provided a real opportunity to practice new advocacy skills and, at the same time, broaden the government's knowledge of NGOs and their role in the policy making process.

U.S. Training of Trainers

Local training capacity is slowly developing in Albania. ORT's strategy is to accelerate the development and leave as one of its distinct legacies, a strong local network of Albanian trainers. During the last quarter, ORT nominated 6 NGO representatives to attend a three-week training of trainers program in Chicago, through the P.I.E.T. program. The Albanian NGO trainers learned how to conduct training needs assessment, to design training modules, and to train other adults trainers. ORT designed the focus of the training to include issues such as: (1) organizational development including volunteer recruitment, training and management; (2) grassroots fundraising; (3) NGO communication and public relations; (4) community outreach, needs assessment, and organizing; and (5) advocacy at the local level. The P.I.E.T. program also included job shadowing at several grassroots level NGOs, national policy-oriented NGOs, and a training NGO. Trainers also attended important civic meetings, such as the Oak Park Village Board meeting and a Rotary Club meeting. The participants developed three training modules for immediate use in Albania: (1) volunteer recruitment and management; (2) community needs assessment; and (3) fundraising. ORT will increase the impact of the P.I.E.T. training by employing or funding these trainers to train a broader group of Albanian trainers throughout Albania.

Technical Assistance Initiatives Addressing the Crisis

Albanian NGOs, and particularly ORT grantees, are actively playing a role in addressing the political and economic crisis. Inter-NGO collaboration has been particularly strong in organizing roundtables, petitions, peaceful demonstrations, radio and TV spots and interviews, fundraising events, and meetings with the newly-appointed coalition government.

One DemNet grantee, the Albanian Youth Council (an umbrella group for over 40 youth NGOs) began a significant fundraising initiative to support partial reconstruction of the recently ransacked,

Agricultural University of Tirana. Immediately after the university campus was destroyed, the Albanian Youth Council recruited volunteers to restore and preserve remaining components of the library and classrooms. The Youth Council set up 2 large tables in the main square in Tirana to raise money to rebuild, and they raised over \$1500 in the first week. ORT local staff is assisting the Albanian Youth Council in designing other initiatives to increase civic action during this time.

Albanian NGOs are also very concerned about local and foreign media coverage of the crisis, because it only shows one picture - rebels with guns. Albanian NGOs are presenting a more complete and realistic picture to local and foreign press, that of people and organizations trying to construct peace and stability. A number of women's NGOs led by ORT grantee, the Women's Center, organized peace demonstrations and, together with other domestic and foreign humanitarian NGOs, broadcasted television spots on Albanian and foreign television urging citizens (including a special plea to children) to return the guns raided from military depots and seek a peaceful resolution.

On March 29, ORT co-funded a peace march with DemNet grantee, the Albanian NGO Forum and the Albanian Civil Society Foundation and the Albanian Center for Reconciliation of Disputes. Local ORT staff worked with NGO organizers to hold a silent peace march in which over 400 NGO representatives from approximately 90 NGOs participated. DemNet grantee, the Albanian Youth Council, led the march carrying a large poster with the words, "Messages from Albanian NGOs," followed by other NGOs with their full membership holding posters about their organization. Much of the Tirana public was very curious and asked for leaflets and information as the NGOs marched through the main square and boulevards. ORT's local staff prepared 1000 leaflets explaining the purpose of the peace march, the role of NGOs as non-partisan social groups working to establish a solid foundation for a real civil society, and a plea urging citizens to join them in their efforts to resolve the problems of the crisis and reconstruction. The march received extensive coverage on local and foreign television, including interviews with Albanian NGO representatives and local ORT staff. Through initiatives like these, Albanian NGOs are sending the public a message that the third sector offers a positive citizen's response in support of democracy building and peace.

ORT grantees are taking the lead in engaging the newly-appointed coalition government in joint initiatives to resolve the crisis. One DemNet grantee, the Albanian NGO Forum, organized a meeting between the newly-appointed Minister of Labor and Social Protection and representatives from the NGO community to introduce the NGO sector, highlighting its past efforts in building a civil society and discussing ways to work with the new government in resolving the crisis. Another DemNet grantee, the Humanitarian Association for Labor Invalids, also met with the new Prime Minister to discuss joint initiatives in alleviating current social conditions and meet needs of the handicapped. The new government officials welcomed the support and cooperation of NGOs and expressed willingness to work together in finding a concrete resolution to the crisis, to alleviating current humanitarian problems, and to begin rebuilding a civil society.

With DemNet funds, the Albanian Helsinki Committee, continues to monitor human rights, and the Committee has released press statements on a daily basis documenting violations and urging respect by the government and rebel forces for human rights. Another DemNet grantee, the Society for

Democratic Culture, formulated recommendations for a new electoral law in anticipation of upcoming parliamentary elections. The Society proposed this draft legislation to all political parties and the government for adoption. Important work by DemNet grantees through human rights and democracy initiatives play a crucial role in bringing about more peaceful change.

Future Technical Assistance & Training

By facilitating information sharing and coalition building among NGOs and presenting NGOs with concrete activity ideas to address the crisis, ORT provides necessary support during a time of crisis. ORT is organizing a meeting of democracy and human rights groups who have experience and training in conflict resolution to discuss their joint initiatives and to offer ORT technical assistance, training, and funding. Some of these groups are already active in assisting citizens in the Southern Albania to speak with a more unified and informed voice. With groups active in economic policy formulation, such as the Albanian Center for Economic Research, ORT is strategizing for a regional meeting on economic reconstructive policy in the wake of collapsed pyramid investment schemes. ORT is bringing together environmental NGOs to address current environmental and health risks arising as a result of stolen and now left abandoned radioactive and toxic materials from military depots. Also as mentioned above with regard to social safety net groups, ORT is working with a coalition group to address the new legislative initiative by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection.

Due to the current crisis in Albania, ORT has postponed a workshop and two conferences until later quarters. ORT in conjunction with ICNL will hold a workshop on "Legal Issues Relating to the Provision of Employment and Social Services by NGOs" either in Albania or in another country with a limited number of Albanian participants. ORT also rescheduled its regional conference entitled, "CEE Shared Experiences and Future NGO Partnerships," in Tirana, until June or later in the fall of 1997. This conference is designed to strengthen institutional development and the public policy role of NGOs in the Southern tier countries by shared learning experiences of the NGOs in the Northern tier countries, and to create partnerships among NGOs in the Northern and Southern tiers. Finally, ORT's third "Building Government-NGO Partnerships" conference for social safety net groups scheduled for February in Vlora has been postponed for a later date. New dates will be set according to the improvement of stability in the country.

GRANT PROGRAM

The current crisis in Albania greatly impacted NGO programs, and very few NGOs focused on project proposal writing. Consequently, ORT and other foreign donors received a small number of grant applications during the last quarter. Third Round grantees signed subagreements and ORT disbursed funds. However, as the crisis escalated, ORT staff assessed the progress of all grantees to determine its impact on grantees. At least half of the projects were functioning, while the others were forced to postpone planned activities and revise their project workplans.

Nonetheless, during the last quarter, ORT grantees reported some key successes in policy dialogue

and improved institutional capacity achieved in earlier months.³ In almost all cases, ORT financial management training and project implementation training improved institutional capacity and reporting of grantees.

Achievement of Round One Subgrantees

With an ORT grant, the **Health for All Foundation** established the "Health For All Center" (HAC) in the center of the capital city. Prior to May 1996, the public had little or no access to health and educational materials. The ORT grant allowed the Health for All Foundation to expand its offices and services outside its previous location in the hospital, which only served medical professionals, to one in city center, which serves the general public and members of health NGOs. Now, the HAC serves as a public health information center and as an important support and networking center for the health NGOs.

As a founding member of the Albanian Health NGO Forum, the Health for All Foundation continues to support the Forum and its members with office space and technical assistance. All members of the Health NGO Forum have access to the HAC's facilities (offices, conference room, and resource library) and to support services including secretarial, communication (telephone, facsimile, and e-mail), and professional publishing services. NGOs can access some services for free and others for a discounted fee. The Health NGO Forum is a relatively young umbrella group and as such has organized some successful joint projects, such as the Health Fair during the summer. However, a number of new projects have been discussed but never implemented. To improve its effectiveness, HAC assisted the Forum in reorganizing its board and administration to allow for better project formulation and implementation. HAC also helped the Forum apply and win funding for the coming year from SNV, the Dutch technical assistance program.

Since June 1995, HAC has actively worked with other NGOs to address women's health issues. By organizing seminars outside the capital and TV emissions on women's health issues, HAC is reaching a broader audience. Joint activities among NGOs and HAC have grown in this field, and HAC now plans to create a coordination office to design and implement joint projects among HAC, the Women's Center, and other women's NGOs. The first project of the new office will be to coordinate a project on sexual education for women throughout Albania.

In addition to supporting NGO networks and joint activities, the HAC provided its own subgrants to individual NGOs, such as the Disabled Persons Association, Geriatrics Association, the Organization for Sexual Education of Students, and the Galen Club. In recognition of its active support of health

³ ORT requires grantees to submit reports every three months from the start date of their project. Consequently, some of the achievements reported in the ORT quarterly report reflect activities from a previous quarter.

NGOs, the Dutch technical assistance project, SNV, selected HAC as a moderator for a regional conference in Macedonia in April for health NGOs.

During the third quarter of its ORT grant, the Health for All Foundation revised the HAC statute to strengthen reporting, consensus based decision-making, and program management. In addition, the director and staff received professional training in health promotion (taught by a Dutch consultant) and financial management and program implementation (taught by ORT.) Under the new statute, the HAC is run by a new executive board of seven members, six of whom are medical professionals and one is the president of the Health NGO Forum. The HAC consolidated projects into four program areas, each having its own program manager: the Mother and Child Health Information Program, the Medical Continuing Education Program, the Community Health and Hygiene Program, and the Publishing office. All of these program offices, except for the publishing office, are located outside the HAC, while the HAC publishes and distributes educational materials and information about their services to the general public.

ORT's financial management training helped HAC put in place an improved financial management system, which is reflected in the new statute. As a result of the ORT training, HAC transformed its financial accounting to a fund accounting system using a modern chart of accounts encompassing all program expenditures and income from donor funding and self-sustaining activities. Both the ORT finance management training and the ORT project implementation training prepared the finance officer for her new statutory responsibilities to assist program managers and the director in preparing budgets for annual program expenditures. Substantial improvements can be seen in HAC's financial and program reporting after ORT training.

Through another ORT grant, the Health for All Foundation is implementing a joint project with the Order of Doctors to draft a medical ethics and law handbook. In the final quarter, the Order of Doctors finished the handbook and prepared a workplan to distribute it in a series of workshops with medical professionals throughout Albania. This handbook will meet the need for a basic, readable guide to ethics and law and promote membership in the Order of Doctors. Due to current conditions in the country, the Health for All Foundation requested a postponement of their project deadline until the workshops can be conducted safely.

In the last quarter, the **Albanian Family Planning Association (AFPA)** used the remainder of its ORT grant to hold a national seminar on reproductive rights. The population expansion policy of the former Communist regime prevented individual families from choosing the number and spacing of children. Although family planning methods were liberalized in 1992, access to such services and information remains limited. In previous quarters, the AFPA helped to expand that knowledge by holding two training seminars in Lezhe and Vlora on reproductive rights and access to reproductive health care. AFPA also is advocating legal guarantees to safe and accessible reproductive health care. AFPA published pamphlet with a compilation of all international legal provisions guaranteeing reproductive rights, and it provided necessary comparative legal materials and technical advice to the Ministry of Health in drafting a reproductive health law. The national seminar was the final project activity, and it provided a necessary forum for NGOs, government, medical professionals, and

students to discuss important issues of the draft law. AFPA is publishing the speeches and working group discussions as supportive background material to use in lobbying government and Parliament and in mobilizing NGO and public support for enactment of the draft law. Scheduled to go to Parliament this next quarter, the draft law will guarantee access to family planning advice, contraceptives, and safe reproductive health services including fertility services.

During the final implementation phase of its ORT grant, **the League of Albanian Anti-Communist Women (LAAW)** presented to government agencies a declaration prepared at its national roundtable. The declaration includes recommendations based on information gathered in five ORT funded-roundtables around the country. The LAAW declaration recognizes the previous contributions of the state and foreign organizations in assisting formerly politically persecuted persons and their families, but identifies remaining problems and needed policy solutions to eliminate existing economic, social, and educational obstacles. The declaration also identified potential areas where NGOs and government could work together to realize projects, such as the necessary government support of a planned LAAW-run elderly care home in Durres, social and psychological assistance programs supported at the local level in conjunction with LAAW, and continued training courses supported and/or organized by the state and by NGOs. LAAW presented the declaration to the new Secretary of State on Women and Youth Issues, Ms. Roza Pati, who agreed to include LAAW in preparatory work on the National Platform of Action, the national policy needed to meet state obligations to the United Nation's Beijing Conference on Women. LAAW also organized subsequent meetings with local labor directorates to discuss employment opportunities and training for formerly politically persecuted women, especially single mothers and girls.

Achievements of Round Two Subgrantees

The Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), supported by an ORT development activities grant, tackled a number of human rights issues during its reporting quarter. Important issues this quarter centered around the final ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights, the local elections, and AHC's fact-finding missions to the South and to three communities of the Roma ethnic population.

In October 1996, Albania deposited its ratifying documents for the European Convention on Human Rights. At the last moment, the Albanian government formulated a reservation to Protocol 1 of the Convention, which states that contracting parties are obligated to hold free and fair elections by secret ballot in which citizens can freely elect their legislative body. The Albanian Helsinki Committee immediately issued press releases criticizing the reservation, stating that it is not in conformity with the spirit of the European Convention. The Albanian Helsinki Commission identified the reservation as an attempt to preserve Albanian laws such as the "Anti-genocide Law" and the "Law on Lustration of Senior Officials," which preclude persons associated with the former communist regime from elected office based solely on their previous association, and not as a result of incrimination or violation of a law. The Albanian Helsinki Committee also held a seminar on the European Convention of Human Rights highlighting the responsibility of Albania to reform legislation to meet European Convention standards. In their speeches, AHC's executive director and

the staff lawyer outlined the necessary components of that reform: (1) a comprehensive constitution which includes guarantees for an independent judiciary free of arbitrary executive interference; (2) amendments to the criminal procedure and civil procedure code to guarantee the right of any person to defend himself with or without a lawyer; (3) abolishing the restrictions on freedom of the press, including numerous articles containing fines and imprisonment of journalists; and (4) abolishing the death penalty. Parliamentarians, ministry personnel, other human rights NGO, and journalists took part in the seminar. Through the ORT grant, AHC exposes attempts by the government to circumvent its international obligations and summons it to respect human rights.

As a part of the ORT grant, AHC plays a vital role as a watch-dog organization. The ORT development activities grant directly funds the AHC's fact finding missions throughout Albania to monitor the situation of various ethnic minority communities and the treatment of prisoners and arrested persons in prisons and jails. The grant also enables AHC to respond and investigate reports it receives relating to specific cases of individual human right violations.

The voices of ethnic minorities are often not heard in national and local policies, and Balkan history shows that disrespect for human rights of ethnic minorities can lead to internal and external tension of significant magnitude. Recently, AHC intervened on behalf of the Greek minority community in Delvina to persuade local education authorities to reopen Greek language classes for 17 ethnic Greek children. Fact finding missions in Tirana, Elbasan, Morava, and Berat, revealed enormous social and economic problems suffered by the Romas communities there. AHC made an immediate appeal to national and local government and citizens in Berat to redress the violent expulsion of 200 Romas families from their homes in Berat. The AHC is preparing a larger report and appeal to the government to address widespread deprivations of public services and social assistance, including basic housing and educational needs.

Poor prison conditions and ill-treatment of prisoners by prison officials violates basic human rights. As a part of the ORT grant, AHC conducts prison monitoring missions. In a recent visit to the prison in Saranda, AHC found the prisoners satisfied with their treatment by prison administrators and frequency of familiar visits. However, the prison infrastructure suffered deficiencies; prison grounds merely consisted of old worker dormitories around which the city has recently encircled, restricting prison space for work and education facilities. AHC located a possible place to relocate the prison outside of Saranda, which is a place currently serving as military barracks, and AHC recommended it to prison authorities. Prison authorities agreed to meet with the Ministry of Defense to discuss the move, while AHC will raise the issue with the Ministry of Justice.

Through the ORT grant, AHC has also drawn the attention of the local Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights and international NGOs to recent human rights violations. Most of the reports received by the AHC in the last two quarters involved harassment of journalists or violations of investigative and pre-trial penal procedures. In each case, AHC issued press statements identifying the violation of constitutional and legal rights and urged the penal and police organs to act in strict conformity with law. In one case, that of group of persons arrested and labeled by prosecutors as members of a terrorist gang, "The Albanian Revenge for Justice," AHC urged the Constitutional

Court to initiate review of prosecutors' statements which appeared to violate the right to a presumption of innocence and the prosecutors' obstruction of access to legal defense for the accused. AHC statements, intending to draw the attention of the justice organs to the observation of legal rules, instead caused a severe reaction from the pro-governmental newspaper, "Rilindja Demokratike," which attacked AHC, labeling them as Communists and supporters of the gang and without addressing any of the legal arguments made by AHC. Despite these attacks, foreign organizations (such as Amnesty International and the Association of Criminal Lawyers of Australia and New Zealand) responded in full support of AHC's appeals with letters to the President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Interior. Once AHC published these support letters in the local press, the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Minorities made a public statement that he had not been informed about the issues or the international concern and intended to directly contact AHC. As a result, the Parliamentary Chair met with AHC's board and agreed to regular contacts to receive information directly from AHC on possible human rights violations. The findings of AHC's human rights monitoring program are now being taken seriously by a governmental oversight body, the Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights. Findings published by AHC of its monitoring work and fact finding missions under the ORT grant are also published in the U.S. State Department's annual reports on human rights in Albania, Human Rights Watch reports, and other foreign human rights publications.

At the beginning of the ORT grant, AHC had no system to track incoming complaints, support letters, and media articles, and it had no measurement system to monitor and evaluate the impact of its project. Working with the ORT staff, AHC made a number of organizational improvements, such as: (1) adding new members to the Committee (including one student member) and additional staff and volunteers, (2) creating various records to register incoming complaints and incoming support letters, (3) establishing an archive for press articles responding to AHC's program, and (4) increasing publicity of its new office with a sign on the main road. During the last quarter, AHC also held its bi-annual elections of new officers. AHC continued to publish its human rights Bulletin which includes all of its news releases, statements, and reports, and it is currently examining how to improve it with more in-depth human rights articles. With ORT funds and technical assistance, AHC has been able to make needed organizational improvements and become better equipped to respond to incoming complaints, to implement a stronger human rights monitoring program, and to begin to measure the impact of its work.

Under its ORT grant, the **Association for the Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment** (PPNEA) is working with Macedonian and Greek counterparts to sponsor the first international consortium to share information and develop a joint protective policy for the Prespa Lakes. During the last grant quarter, PPNEA with its partners delivered invitations and requests for papers to representatives of government, academic institutions, and NGOs in the three countries. PPNEA, as the host, has already received a number of responses. The symposium was originally scheduled to take place in Korca, Albania in April, however, due to the circumstances there, PPNEA postponed the date for at least two months.

In contrast to the rapidly changing economic conditions in Albania, the environmental movement is

emerging slowly. Government interest in environment protection is dwarfed by concerns for economic growth, and public awareness and appreciation for the environment is generally very low. Through an ORT grant, the **Albanian Biologists Association** is addressing one of the causal factors for this lack of concern through its project, "Curriculum Reform in Environmental Education in Secondary and High Schools." Current teaching programs in secondary and high schools do not directly address environmental concerns; instead, they merely provide pupils with a general view of nature and biology without treating the impact of human beings on it. The Biologists Association introduced their modern teaching model entitled, "Closer to Nature, Closer to Ourselves," which includes resource materials on environmental protection and civic action and a number of experiments, excursions, case studies and role playing exercises for students to creatively learn the relationship of humans and the environment. The Biologists Association used its ORT funds to conduct five teacher training seminars (a sixth still pending) in the cities/towns of Gjirokaster, Saranda, Kavaja, Peqin and Lac to introduce the model and to lobby the government to adopt the model into the permanent curriculum.

With DemNet funds, the Biologists Association achieved its intended results. The project increased the focus of educational authorities on the need for environmental education in teaching programs, and each of the local education directorates in the districts as well as the Institute of Pedagogical Research issued letters supporting the introduction of the Biologist Association's model teaching program into the permanent curriculum. Furthermore, local educational directorates immediately accepted the teaching materials as supplemental background materials for teachers to use in the free time in their curriculum. Through the DemNet grant, the Biologists Association trained 138 teachers (another 25 teachers planned for the future) in the new teaching methods. Since the training seminars, a number of teachers have organized student activities and actions using the training materials and requested additional environmental materials and information on NGO membership and forming student NGOs. An added and unforeseen result was the change in the level of involvement of local education directorates and teachers in the curriculum development and reform process. Teachers, NGOs representative, local and national government representatives discussed reform in a roundtable format, and this gave teachers a real sense of involvement. In addition, the Ministry of Education appointed an inspector in each local education directorate to help organize the teacher training seminars and to monitor the future implementation of "green ideas" in all the schools in the district. Deriving from the joint project implementation, the Biologists Association established a strong cooperative working relationship with the government institutions, in particular, the Institute for Pedagogical Research, the Ministry of Education, and the local education directorates in different districts.

A final result of the DemNet funded project was the increased understanding of the local educational needs. The Biologists Association is using findings from its teacher evaluations to structure a clear strategy for environmental educational reform and has developed a number of policy recommendations to propose to the Ministry of Education, the Committee for Environmental Protection, and the Institute of Pedagogical Studies after the sixth teachers training course. Its policy recommendations include: (1) reforming curriculum to include concrete theories in separate classes, concrete experiments, and concrete field work; (2) incorporating environmental concepts

into all other subjects, such as literature; (3) establishing a formal and functioning partnership among the government agencies and NGOs in curriculum development and revision; (4) preparation of a Teachers Guide for Environmental Education; (5) continued support of teachers' training in environmental education; (6) funding for lab equipment to support environmental experiments and excursions; and (7) organizing a national forum for discussing future strategies and actions to introduce environmental education as a clear "green line" of teaching programs. The Biologists Association recently submitted to ORT a project proposal to fund a national conference on environmental education, as recommended above. Through this conference, the Biologists Association hopes to accomplish its ultimate project goal of persuading the government to permanently adopt its model teaching program.

Reports of drug overdoses and an increase in alcohol abuse by teenagers reveal a new and growing problem in Albania. However, no comprehensive study exists which attempts to measure and understand the problem or its consequences. The association, **Useful to Albanian Women**, is using an ORT grant to set up a monitoring center on drug and alcohol abuse by students to conduct research and help formulate a comprehensive policy to address these issues. After the first six months of the project, UAW publicized the opening of the public monitoring center and its counseling hotline and formed cooperative working partnerships with two high schools, parents and teachers, and the national health governmental agencies.

Drugs and alcohol abuse present a social problem of potentially great magnitude, and thus they have been a sensitive problem for Albanian government officials. In forming collaborative relations with the government counterparts, ORT grantee UAW had to proceed cautiously and overcome some difficult hurdles. At first, local high school directors expressed reluctance at having their schools be a subject for research as they were afraid that the study results might hurt the school's reputation or themselves as school directors. By careful persuasion and setting initial ground rules, UAW was able to enter into concrete working relations with two high schools in Tirana. School directors at "Sami Frasheri" high school agreed to organize a special "Drug Week" in February in which UAW will conduct its student survey, show a film on the subject of drug abuse, and two doctors on the UAW staff will make a presentation and distribute educational materials to the student body in the school auditorium. UAW plans to conduct similar educational sessions and distribute the survey in the "Partizani" high school sometime during the next quarter.

After initial meetings with school directors, UAW won the support of parents and teachers through presentations in parent-teacher meetings. UAW described the purpose of the DemNet funded research and advocacy project and provided information on how drug use starts, its harmful consequences, and ways in which parents, teachers, students and UAW could engage in abuse prevention. Although parents seemed reluctant at the beginning of the meetings to believe that their own children might use drugs and alcohol, by the end of the meetings, the parents were very interested in receiving a future copy of UAW's guide describing different drugs, their effects, and their risks to human health. By the second round of meetings at the partner schools, UAW found that a group of students, teachers and parents had become so interested in the UAW efforts that they formed an association called, "STOP DRUGS The future is in our hands." UAW has also received a

number of calls to its counseling hotline by parents requesting information, as a result of the broad publicity of the center. Therefore, UAW will produce a guide booklet not only for students on drug abuse, but a guide for parents and relatives on drug abuse prevention and treatment. During the next quarter, UAW will publish these documents.

Within the policy advocacy component of the ORT grant, UAW built strong collaborative working relationships with the Institute of Public Health, the Directorate of Health Education, and the newly-created National Committee on Drugs. The directors were enthusiastic that UAW, the first NGO to contact them, was working to address these problems. The National Committee on Drugs shared a copy of its "National Plan on the War Against Drugs," and the director agreed to collaborate with UAW in policy formulation. The director provided UAW a letter addressed to the Secondary Education Department to support the work of UAW in the schools, and he also agreed to organize a round table with NGOs and the government to discuss the problem of drug abuse.

To strengthen its policy advocacy position, UAW is collaborating with other NGOs. To this end, UAW staff and volunteers participated in a number of seminars and training courses organized by Albanian NGOs, such as a conference on Youth and AIDS, sponsored by the Independent Sociologic Center "Eureka," and a seminar on "How to Prepare a Health Survey," sponsored by the Health NGO Forum. UAW also met with the Albanian Red Cross, Albanian Family Planning Association, and Catholic Relief Services to discuss their work in drug and alcohol abuse. UAW realizes that collaborative work is the only way to combat such a potentially harmful social problem. Accordingly, UAW established a concrete base of working relationships and infrastructure to began data collection and policy formulation.

An ORT grant supports the expansion of the activities of the **Albanian Youth Council (AYC)** to five university cities in Albania. During this quarter, the AYC strengthened its new branches in Korca and Gjirokaster, and its relations with the new Secretary of State on Youth Issues. The Korca AYC coordination center co-sponsored two youth events: (1) a masquerade ball of 100 students on the National Day on the War Against AIDs designed to raise awareness of young people about AIDs; and (2) a National Youth Day picnic, in cooperation with the local government of Korca, to bring together 100 young people from the city and villages. Both events provided a forum to build the membership of AYC and its member NGOs and also solidified a working relationship with the local municipality. The Gjirokaster AYC coordination center has been very active since its creation. The center organizes routine monthly meetings with youth groups to discuss youth issues and youth activism and to initiate joint activities among NGOs and fundraising ideas. In December, the Gjirokaster AYC coordination center, in conjunction with the NGO Forum and supported by donations of the local business community, organized an event surrounding the International Day on the War Against AIDs. AYC's members worked together to prepare educational materials on AIDs and to develop a public education campaign through TV and radio broadcasts. The Gjirokaster AYC and local youth ecological association are also working on a joint project to protect and preserve historic areas in the city. With the ORT grant, AYC encourages joint projects which engage youth in Gjirokaster and Korca in civic action.

The ORT grant also supports the regional AYC coordination center in Tirana which initiates new branches and provides training, technical assistance and financial support to them. The AYC maintains close contact with the new Secretary of State on Youth Issues and discussed cooperative efforts to support youth NGOs throughout Albania. On the request of the AYC, the Secretary of State promised to designate funds to local government under the 1997 state budget to include a specific item for sponsoring local NGO activities. The Secretary of State also proposed a joint program with the AYC to support the creation of youth NGOs in 10 cities through funding and organized youth events.

Over the last quarter, the AYC has strengthened its institutional capacity, particularly in relation to its branches. Prior to the ORT grant, the AYC had one branch in Shkodra which operated autonomously and without any joint planning or shared information. As a result of the ORT grant and ORT project implementation training, the AYC initiated a monthly reporting procedure for the branches to share information and workplans with the regional coordination center in Tirana, thus increasing communication and building planning and reporting skills within the new branches. With the new information learned in the ORT financial management training, AYC regional staff are able to train branch staff and member NGOs in setting up financial management systems and reporting program activity. Thus, ORT training significantly impacts the branches and their members at a crucial start-up phase.

The socialized public health care system in Albania is intended to guarantee free and appropriate health care to all Albanian citizens, but the reality is different. Often, doctors ask for payment for services, and the medical profession and hospitals are rarely held accountable for medical negligence or mistake. Under an ORT grant, the **Albanian Patients Association** is addressing these contradictions by creating a charter of patients rights. Modeled on English, French, and American patients rights laws and encompassing all existing rights included in Albanian laws, the Albanian Patients Association's "Charter of Patients Rights" would replace the many inconsistent hospital and emergency room rules for medical professionals. Furthermore, it is an appropriate time for the Albanian Patients Association to propose adoption of the charter, as the Ministry of Health is currently drafting legislation which would impact patients rights. The association will publish copies of the charter and make them available to the public in hospitals, emergency rooms, and book stores, and continue to press the government for comprehensive patients rights.

Approximately 23,000 persons in Albania are temporarily or permanently incapacitated due to accidents caused in the workplace. The **Humanitarian Association of Labor Invalids** (Labor Invalids Association) formed in 1991 to represent their rights and interests. In 1994 and 1995, the Labor Invalids Association succeeded in lobbying the government for two laws recognizing a special status for labor invalids and guarantees special pensions, tax exemptions, and discounted rates for travel and entry to sport and cultural events. The 1995 law authorizes the Labor Invalids Association to issue and distribute labor invalid identification certificates. Through an ORT grant, the Labor Invalids Association is implementing the provisions of these laws by producing and distributing 12,000 labor invalid identification cards which include a certification of invalid status, a list of legal rights and benefits, and the Labor Invalids Association contact address. As a result, labor invalids

are now able to know and benefit from their legal rights and benefits. By virtue of ORT funds, the Labor Invalids Association have made production and distribution of the cards self-sustainable. The board adopted a new plan to sell the identification cards for one-half the production costs and subsidize the remaining costs with membership fees, alleviating the need for future donor funds. The Labor Invalids Association also participated in the ORT financial management training in February, and with ORT continued assistance will provide training to all of its branch leaders to further strengthen financial accounting and reporting according to their sustainability plan.

An ORT micro-grant supported the **Society for Democratic Culture's (SDC) project, "Voter Education Television and Radio Spots for the Albanian Local Elections."** After the broad international criticism of the May national parliamentary elections, the local elections in October became a critical test for Albanian democracy. The SDC used its DemNet grant to fund television and radio broadcasts which provided technical information on voting procedures, called upon citizens to make an informed vote to select the best candidates, and urged citizens to respect the rule of law and the voting law and procedures. The radio spot was broadcasted daily before the morning and evening news for the three weeks leading up to the election. Since the spots were broadcasted from the state national radio, they reached the greatest number of Albanians. The SDC's message was the sole independent domestic voice directed to Albanians to highlight the values of informed voting and free and fair elections. Most persons interviewed by the SDC said they heard the radio spot and found it a necessary and valuable message for the current situation. In addition, SDC local chapters said the radio spot greatly boosted their work in the districts as it presented the SDC as a serious citizens' organization with a professional vision. Various politicians applauded the radio broadcast stating that it was a great undertaking which political parties could not implement in the electoral campaign.

The SDC's attempts to broadcast television messages were not as successful. After SDC prepared the TV broadcasts, the state television suddenly refused to conclude the broadcast contract, inappropriately citing that only the Permanent Central Election Committee was authorized to decide broadcasting during election campaigns under election law provisions governing broadcast time allotments for political parties. The Central Election Committee refused to grant permission for the broadcast stating that the right to teach citizens to vote belonged to the government and not to NGOs. (It appears that the state television and the Permanent Central Election Committee intended to unfairly punish SDC for the findings released from its media monitoring campaign (DemNet funded) in the national elections which exposed the state media's biased campaign coverage of the ruling party; this previous act by the state media violated the same election law provision.) Ultimately, the local election process was more quiet and without serious incidents. The DemNet funded radio spots played a positive role in reducing the tension and in supporting the work of the SDC. The television spots would have bolstered the SDC's message and supplemented the radio spots with valuable technical voter education. SDC's project highlighted the need for private television and radio in Albania, and the SDC continues to advocate the need for this reform.

Future Grant Rounds

Since the ORT office received a limited number of proposals during the last quarter and the ORT Project Director was evacuated, the ORT office will consider and recommend future proposals to the Democracy Commission on a rolling basis as they are received. ORT expects to receive and recommend a number of proposals in the democracy sector due to the upcoming national elections.

STRATEGY FOR NEXT YEAR

STRATEGY FOR NEXT YEAR

ORT's strategy for next year is to continue to bridge partnerships between government and NGOs, particularly at the local level, through technical assistance, training, and grants. ORT will continue its proactive approach in seeking NGOs in the weaker priority sectors (environment and economic growth) and to reach more NGOs in the rural areas. The Project Management Unit will monitor and support its grantees who received money in Year One and Two in successfully implementing their projects and achieving concrete results. Specifically for technical assistance and training, ORT will continue to train grantees and their branches in financial management, project implementation, and advocacy. ORT will expand this training to reach non-grantees as well. New training will be introduced such as fundraising, NGO organizational issues such as the role of NGO boards, volunteer recruitment and management, and public relations, and community needs assessment and community organizing. To further strengthen the local training capacity, ORT will use the local trainers developed in Year One and Two to train a broader group of local trainers from throughout Albania. In particular, ORT will engage the six new local trainers who have completed a US training of trainers program in March to set up its training of trainers program. Local training capacity fostered by ORT in policy advocacy, policy research, financial management, project implementation, NGO law, and environmental advocacy will be used extensively in the Year Three.

TIMELINE FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

A timeline for program implementation will be prepared and submitted with the next quarterly report. Current conditions in Albania prevent a realistic presentation of technical assistance and training dates. While the ORT Project Director is located outside of Albania due to the U.S. State Department evacuation order, grant proposals will be recommended to the Democracy Commission on a rolling basis, and grant round deadlines will not be strictly observed.