

**Forging New
Alliances:
Democracy and
Governance
Lessons from WID
Projects**

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THE OBJECTIVE: INTEGRATING LESSONS INTO MAINSTREAM PROGRAMS

Since October 1997, USAID's Office of Women in Development has funded the PROWID project, Promoting Women in Development. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) has implemented PROWID in collaboration with the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA). PROWID is a grant-making program aimed at promoting development through practical insights obtained from innovative, field-tested interventions. Through 47 grants, PROWID has supported original pilot activities, operations research, and advocacy conducted by community-based institutions and non-governmental organizations. The purpose of these activities is to demonstrate how women can be better involved and benefit from development interventions across a range of sectors, including democracy, economic growth, environment, and post-conflict reconstruction. The goal is to improve the lives of women (and their families) in developing countries and economies in transition.

The final phase of PROWID involves information dissemination, including reports, conferences, and workshops.

There are two approaches to information dissemination:

- (1) Disseminating information about women's projects to people who work with and on behalf of women; and
- (2) Sharing lessons learned with the broader USAID community to facilitate the integration of gender into mainstream programs.

For the second approach, PROWID began in early 1999 to plan sector-based workshops as a means of sharing results with the USAID community. For the democracy and governance workshop, PROWID's Contract Officer, Cate Johnson, suggested collaboration with the USAID, Center for Democracy and Governance. Susan Jay, a key partner in the Center for Democracy and Governance, suggested that PROWID ask Hilary Sims-Feldstein, the WIDTECH Project's training specialist, and Marcia Greenberg, WIDTECH's democracy specialist, to help design and implement the workshop.

The Workshop Challenge

The objective of the democracy and governance workshop was to integrate lessons learned from four USAID-funded WID projects into the Agency's broader democracy portfolio. The workshop was to introduce PROWID activities, best practices, and results to the democracy community—but particularly to democracy and governance managers in USAID.

The challenge, therefore, was to get democracy officers to see the democracy lessons in WID projects. This led to three workshop objectives: (1) to get democracy specialists to attend a WID-based workshop; (2) to highlight lessons with relevance for USAID's democracy

officers and (3) to design a process for assimilating lessons into future work. Thus, the planners sought to design a workshop that would engage participants in thinking about the issues, comparing the featured activities with those they manage or implement, and incorporating some alternative perspectives into their work. The workshop was to go beyond standard presentations to provide participants with a learning and thinking process that would help them meld the PROWID lessons with their work objectives.

Issues to Ponder

The workshop highlighted several issues for consideration:

- How might the lessons from “women’s projects” extend beyond lessons about women to offer ideas about activity design and implementation?
- How may project design or implementation link certain elites—namely, legal professionals—with citizen activists who work at the grassroots?
- How may project designers build flexibility into their plans that enables participants to decide issues of focus, partners, and strategies?
- How may WID projects contribute to the broader objectives of raising citizen awareness of legal rights, building constituencies for the rule of law, strengthening capacity for advocacy, holding government accountable, transparency and policy change, and further enabling of civil society?
- How could workshop participants integrate some of the lessons learned by PROWID into their responsibilities as democracy and governance managers—especially those relating to issues such as sustainability and managing for results?

The Learning Process

The first session of the workshop featured brief presentations about four PROWID activities: (1) a regional justice sector program in Latin America and the Caribbean; (2) a capacity-building project for human rights activists in Central Asia; (3) a human rights advocacy program in Croatia; and (4) a program to train Russian lawyers to address domestic violence. To ensure a focus on elements relevant to democracy officers and to ensure that each presentation provided basic and comparable information, the presenters were asked to respond to carefully targeted questions.

The second session was a mapping exercise. Participants were divided into small groups, each looking at one activity. To each group a project representative provided a preliminary Venn diagram of her project, mapping the presence of primary institutions—including the project itself, major allies, and donors—and indicating status of each institution and the links between them. With the assistance of the project representative, participants added to the map by brainstorming about the individuals, organizations, and institutions with which the project collaborated. This was an interactive way for the participants themselves to determine three factors: (1) the potential range and diversity of partners for the activity; (2) the distinctions between “elite” or legal professionals and “grassroots” actors; and (3) the difference between linkages intended as part of the activity design and those that developed organically through implementation. (For copies of those Venn diagram maps, see Appendix A.)

The participants were then asked to consider three issues:

- (1) What can be done in program or portfolio design to enhance positive connections between elite-based and grassroots/citizens-based groups?
- (2) How do you define results? What can you pre-define? Are there substantive elements in program design that lead to results and opportunities that you cannot articulate in advance? How can you plan for that in program implementation?
- (3) What program design elements or other practices related to the substance of the program lead to sustainability?

A fourth issue was suggested by the Director of the Center for the Democracy and Governance, after she moderated the presentation of the activities:

- (4) Given that USAID’s democracy officers engage in a democracy assessment process that considers such factors as key political problems, allies and opponents, and rules of the game, did the featured activities build democracy or women’s empowerment? How are they related? Does women’s empowerment work toward democracy and governance?

The small group discussions were spirited and, as planned, focused primarily on democracy issues and opportunities, rather than on WID concerns. The workshop ended with a plenary discussion of small group maps and discussion of issues highlighted in the questions.

THE PROWID ACTIVITIES

American University: Transforming Women’s Legal Status in Latin America

Initially conceived in response to the legal challenge posed by violence against women, this PROWID project helped develop new curricula and teaching methods at law schools in Latin

America by integrating gender throughout the subject matter.¹ The project fostered a climate where legal academics and women's advocates, in writing, teaching, and law practice, can achieve legitimacy from a gender perspective. It has sought to strengthen ties with the advocacy community, preparing advocates and scholars to address gender violence and other forms of discrimination more effectively.

B.a.B.e.: Promoting Human Rights, Peace, and Self-Reliance

Women in the former Yugoslavia need strong support in developing their organizations and in building skills for social change and political participation. In fall 1996, PROWID issued a two-year grant to Be Active, Be Emancipated (B.a.B.e.), a women's human rights group located in Zagreb, Croatia. B.a.B.e. conducted human rights education workshops in Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia. Through these workshops, B.a.B.e. expected to increase women's awareness about their rights and status, and to build the capacity of fledgling women's organizations to design and implement local action strategies—strategies that fulfill women's basic needs and enhance their decision-making roles. B.a.B.e. offered technical assistance in project design and evaluation and provided a forum for sharing lessons learned to the local implementing organizations as they undertake new activities. Through this combination of training and mentored follow-up, B.a.B.e. developed a network of trained human rights activists who will guide the region's civil and democratic reform process. Started by women in a grassroots nongovernmental organization, B.a.B.e. staff have become more professional and the organization increasingly enjoys the participation of skilled, experienced professionals.

Central Asian Republics: Capacity-Building for Women's Human Rights Advocacy

Until recently, human rights law and practice have not generally been interpreted as applying to the particular rights violations women suffer, but based on civil and political rights to citizens regardless of sex. There is a need to enhance the capacity and expand the corps of skilled human rights advocates, leaders, and organizations around the world. In cooperation with Women, Law and Development International (WLDI) and the Network Women's Program of the Open Society Institute (NWP-OSI), PROWID has undertaken a program of training and technical assistance to strengthen local and regional advocacy groups in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Based on WLDI's curriculum Women's Human Rights Step by Step, the project aims to help women's advocacy groups to:

- Design and carry out effective women's human rights advocacy strategies;

¹ The following institutions were involved in this project: Universidad de Buenos Aires (Argentina), Universidad de Diego Portales (Chile), Universidad de Costa Rica (Costa Rica), Universidad de San Carlos (Guatemala), Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (Mexico), and University Pontifica Catolica (Perú).

- Be influential institutional advocates for women's rights within national, regional, and international fora; and
- Be effective trainers, guiding and orienting their constituents on women's rights advocacy.

Program fellows were selected based on a competitive application process, with five representatives from each country participating. As part of the capacity-building process, participants were required to implement at least one organizational strategy to promote or defend women's human rights in their countries of origin. Fellows from Central Asia were supported in their efforts with PROWID-funded seed grants and a Central Asia region advisor who provided ongoing technical assistance to groups as they designed, implemented, and monitored their strategies.

Russian Lawyers Advocacy Project

Based in Russia, the Russian Lawyers Advocacy Project has aimed to promote legal literacy related to violence against women by working with crisis centers in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Murmansk, and Saratov. Over two years, this project has focused on improving the institutional capacity of domestic violence and rape crisis centers in Russia, and developing the legal advocacy skills of lawyers associated with these centers. Project components have included implementing public education programs and producing a cadre of women lawyers strategically located throughout Russia to provide legal counsel to victims of violence. On a national level, a campaign to reform legislation related to domestic violence and sexual assault was launched with citizen participation in its formulation. The training provided was critical for the legal counsel and reform needed in Russia, where gender violence has recently been exposed as a public issue. By strengthening and professionalizing the women's crisis center movement, the project not only has improved the quality of services provided but also has helped carve out a vital role for women's NGOs in Russia.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The O-K-L-A-H-O-M-A Musical Lesson: Can the Farmers and the Ranchers Be Friends? From the mapping exercise, participants gained insights on partner linkages and the critical need for broad-based support. Many projects focus on one level or the other—on the legal professionals, such as lawyers and judges, or on citizens in legal literacy programs. It is possible, however, and often advantageous, to link those groups. Such linkages help legal professionals see how their work may, or may not, benefit or include average people. These alliances enable citizens who seek to know, assert, and vindicate their rights gain access to people with expertise.

The Fiddler on the Roof Lesson: Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Are All Elites a Good Match?

There was debate regarding who is an elite, when and how it is useful to work with them, and whether all elites are the same? Participants pointed out that many NGO leaders are elites. The focus, however, was on the extent to which the work or perspective of elites who are legal professionals includes consideration of how the justice sector may be used or accessible to average citizens.

**Participants' Input:
Who Is an Elite?**

- People with certain educational level
- People with special expertise—such as legal professionals
- People of a certain class
- For purposes of the workshop: legal professionals, such as lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and representatives of Ministries of Justice

In fact, nearly all of the people with whom USAID and its grantees work are elite.

Recommendation: Workshop participants suggested that one way to link legal professionals and the needs and interests of average citizens is to select legal professionals who have a commitment to the grassroots, to public service, and to access to justice. Therefore, it is important to select participants—for training of trainers, for example—very carefully. They should be personally and individually capable, but should also have linkages, such as coming from an NGO that works at the local level.

**Participants' Input:
What Are Some Linkages, Means of Forging Alliances or Communicating
Between Legal Professionals and the Grassroots?**

- Work with leaders from NGOs, education, or labor unions who connect to the grassroots
- Utilize the media
- Find individuals with grassroots origins who became elites or legal professionals, but maintained connections with homes and villages
- Select elites for participation who represent an open, constituency-oriented NGO
- Select elites who can translate legal jargon into common terms and thereby reach a broad base
- Forge issue-based collaboration
- Develop advocacy plan to connect to allies or social movements

The King and I Lesson: With Whom Shall We Dance?

It is often not possible for project designers to identify or define partners in advance. Frequently the logical partners depend on the issue that will be addressed. In cases where legal literacy and advocacy training is followed by advocacy projects, it will be the trainees

who select the topic for advocacy—which will in turn lead to partners who share their advocacy aims.

Recommendation: Participants decided that there are advantages to designing projects to be flexible—that is, open to how things evolve and develop. A two-stage process is one way to plan for training, for example, leaving some of the structure and partners open so the training participants can participate in the design. For example, design of the women’s advocacy project for the Central Asian republics began with a structured training program, but then allowed for the trainees to develop their own advocacy plans, identify key allies, and access small grants to finance start-up activities.

WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT AND DEMOCRACY-BUILDING

During the small group work, some of the groups addressed the question posed by the Director of the Center for Democracy and Governance, Does women’s empowerment build or contribute to democracy and good governance? In other words, if one views the PROWID activities as women’s empowerment activities, did they help to achieve USAID’s democracy and governance objectives?

It should be noted this was an additional, unplanned question. Therefore, there was no discussion of what women’s empowerment entails—in particular, as reflected by the featured PROWID activities.² From the discussion, we may infer that participants thought of women’s empowerment as:

- (1) Helping 50 percent of a country’s population learn about their rights, both legal and economic;
- (2) Building the capability of citizens to learn how to appreciate and use the rule of law, to be advocates, to influence policy change, and to make their government work for them;
- (3) Teaching lawyers to help women utilize the justice sector to protect themselves from domestic violence; and
- (4) Strengthening law schools and legal clinics to develop legal professionals who can represent diverse interests and uphold the rule of law.

² Although the question was not explicitly addressed in discussions, it may be noted that the workshop did not present the activities as illustrations of women’s empowerment. Consequently, there might have been some debate about whether the activities focused on women’s empowerment and whether that was an additional consequence of the work.

Regarding the link between technical assistance focused on women's empowerment and capacity-building for democracy and good governance, the small groups had time only to put forth preliminary ideas.

To further an ongoing discussion of this question, their ideas are reported here in terms of the Center for Democracy and Governance strategic assessment framework and subsector work. The strategic assessment framework looks at five factors: (1) consensus, (2) rule of law, (3) inclusion, (4) competition of ideas, and (5) good governance.

Suggestions relating to the framework included the following:

- *Consensus:* The strategic assessment framework looks at whether there is broad agreement on the rules of the game for democratic processes—such as those established in a constitution. The written, formal rules may or may not include women as full partners. In some cases, the rules may be clear on paper, such as who is entitled to citizenship, but not respected in practice. This can be the case for women who are not empowered. But if women are active and participating, the rules include them, the written rules are consistent with practice, and women may be among those whose support lends legitimacy to democratic processes.
- *Rule of Law:* Many women need the protections of an effective justice sector. Their support will increase the citizen-base pushing for access to justice, respect for the rule of law, and fair and impartial enforcement of the law.
- *Inclusion and Participation:* The strategic assessment framework assesses the breadth degree of inclusion. Legal literacy and advocacy training for any disadvantaged or excluded group leads to greater interest and capacity to participate in democracy and governance. Empowering women as citizens may enable them to improve the representative nature of government.
- *Competition of Ideas:* Women's participation in democracy may increase or enrich the issues and perspectives in a democracy. Further, in some instances when a government does not tolerate opposition, it may permit women's groups to raise issues because it does not view them as a serious threat to its power.
- *Good Governance:* Training women may improve governance by interesting and enabling citizens in the democratic culture of watching government's actions and holding government officials accountable.

Other ideas about women's empowerment relate to some of USAID's subsectoral areas of focus:

- *Implementing Policy Change:* Empowerment leads to mobilization, which is active citizen participation in setting policy and allocating resources. Women may be involved in debating, lobbying, advocating, and the like.

- *Legislative Strengthening:* Women's involvement as constituents and networks brings more information to the legislators who are making policy, drafting laws, and allocating resources.
- *Civil Society Arena:* Those activities that strengthen the capacity of women's NGOs also enable those organizations to serve as watchdogs, providers of services, representatives of citizens' interests, and models for other NGOs.
- *Civic Education:* Enabling, activating, and strengthening the capacity of certain individuals and organizations make them examples for others in society of how citizens behave and participate in a democratic society.
- *Political Participation:* Women may start on their own politics before national politics. They get experience from what they know. They are compelled to become active in democracy by issues of particular, personal importance, but then have the skills to participate more broadly.
- *Sequencing:* Although democracy and governance programs often work on the supply side of democratic institutions, these kinds of activities build the demand side. Should one or the other come first, or should they happen concurrently?
- *Democratic Culture:* Women's advocacy is experience and practice in being active, effective citizens in a democracy. For example, the women who work with B.a.B.e. in Croatia have launched a citizens' initiative to combat violence, supported the needs of refugees, focused attention on the importance of a free media, and used the international human rights mechanisms of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to pressure their government to pay more attention to the needs and rights of women.
- *Decentralization:* Women's participation at the local level—as leaders or constituents—brings into local government some of the key people who know about, have interests in, and are committed to local issues, such as education, local economic development, and protection of the environment.

In contrast with the positive linkages between women's empowerment and democracy, some participants noted that women's empowerment may sometimes have limited democratic impacts. They pointed out that empowering only elite women may result in failure to engage women throughout society. Similarly, they expressed concern that not all women who are empowered then maintain, cultivate, or use connections with constituencies or villages. (The same may be said, however, for elite men in government.)

CONCLUSION

Not only are women's rights human rights, but women's activities are peoples' activities. Some WID-funded projects may offer lessons learned both for WID activities and for democracy and governance activities in general.

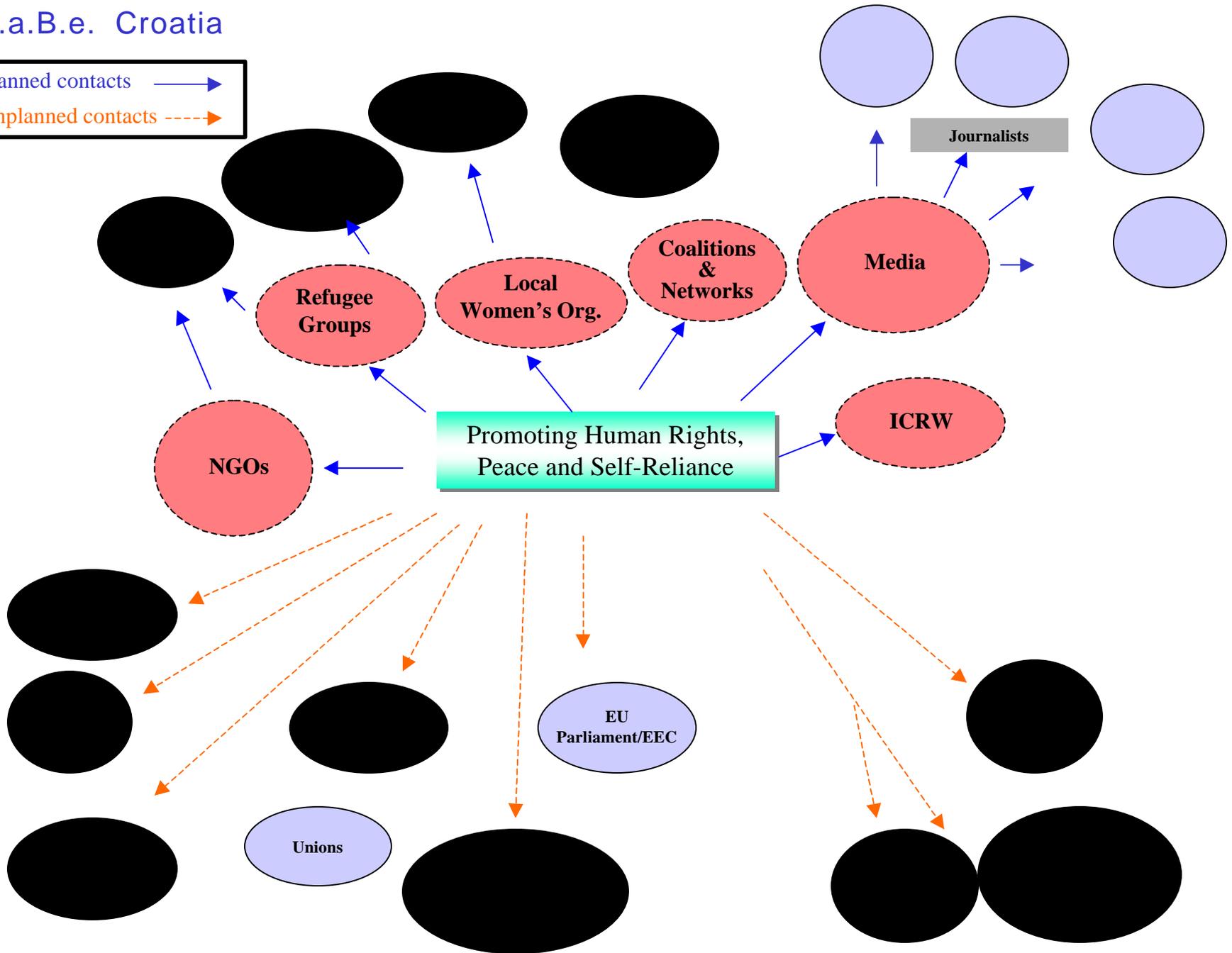
USAID's Office of Women in Development continues to work with the Agency's technical centers and bureaus to explore ways in which assistance may be strengthened by paying attention to women and to gender issues. In this case, the Office of Women in Development was pleased to collaborate with the Center for Democracy and Governance in several ways: to analyze the PROWID activities from the center's perspective, to plan a workshop together that would be meaningful for democracy and governance officers, and to encourage creative thinking about integrating lessons learned into the Agency's broader democracy and governance portfolio. As this was a productive learning process for planners and participants alike, the effort should encourage more such collaboration in the future.

APPENDIX A

MAPPING EXERCISE FOR EACH OF THREE ACTIVITIES

(partner organizations and institutions with which the partners forged alliances)

B.a.B.e. Croatia



WLDI - Central Asian Republics

