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I. INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the challenges facing local government in Bulgaria, in 1997 the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) charged the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) with helping Bulgaria to find sustainable local solutions to the country's unsteady march towards democracy and decentralization. In partnership with the Bulgarian Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR), ICMA's Bulgarian Technical Twinning Program was created. Through ICMA and FLGR, USAID initiated a pilot partnership program in 1997 between US cities and Bulgarian municipalities.

Phase V of the program, August 2004-February 2008, was designed to build on previous program components and successes that had made the largest impact on the development of Bulgarian municipalities. It also provided the potential to continue making changes in the way Bulgarian municipalities are managed and serve their citizens. Being a very successful model for creation of partnerships between Bulgarian and US cities, the program further fostered the exchange, upgrade and wide dissemination of experience, know-how, and effective local governance practices. The overall goals of phase V were to strengthen the capacity of Bulgarian local governments in developing and applying new approaches and methodologies for solving current problems in Bulgarian communities, and secondly, to enhance the capabilities of Bulgarian local governments to facilitate economic growth.

Phase V program activities were performed in the following major components:

- Local economic development and marketing project,
- Replication of infrastructure management practices, and
- Replication of a pilot composting program.

Best practice replication became a main program instrument in completing program goals in Phase V, where US best practices were increasingly introduced with the assistance of Bulgarian professionals. As the City Links Program developed from phase to phase, it also evolved, with the traditional city-to-city partnerships giving way in Phase V to new partnership models. Networking became a major approach for program implementation. It replaced the individual partnership model. The exchange of experience and best practices continued with the assistance of practitioners from several US cities: Auburn, Alabama; Charlottesville, Virginia; Golden, Colorado; West Bend, Wisconsin; Kettering, West Carrollton and Johnstown, Ohio; and San Bernardino, California.

Going through several phases, the CityLinks program in Bulgaria celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2007. In that year, the program had significant achievements in its three program areas: local economic development, waste management, and public infrastructure management. Also in 2007, USAID granted a seven-month extension for the program, from September 2007 through February 2008, to bridge the period of local elections and to help FLGR establish or re-establish relationships with newly elected local governments.

II. PROGRAM RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The key objectives for the City Links Program's fifth and final phase were accomplished.

- The capacity of Bulgarian municipalities was strengthened and resulted in better service provision.
- Best practices/models implemented under the previous phases of the program were multiplied and the impact from their implementation was enhanced.
- The program was expanded and involved 55 municipalities: 39 were prepared to market their communities, 19 municipalities replicated the rural area composting

program, and nine municipalities began to use an optimized street and road maintenance model.

- Program achievements were institutionalized by anchoring program activities in local expertise within the municipalities as well as in FLGR thus ensuring for program sustainability.
- All program results were achieved through the effective collaboration and know-how transfer between Bulgarian municipalities and US practitioners who were providing guidance and creative solutions to their Bulgarian partners.

Overall results and achievements within the program's major component areas include the following.

Expansion and further development of the Local Economic Development Consortium Model:

- 25 new local economic development (LED) projects were implemented that resulted in 2500 new jobs.
- The position of a local economic development specialist was created in 39 municipalities and offices dedicated to economic development were established in many of them. This has led to an active approach to LED in the communities.
- Over 100 LED professionals from participating municipalities were trained.
- Marketing materials and a LED strategy was developed for all participating municipalities.
- The marketing website was developed and launched on the Internet. Special emphasis was given to the site's format/structure and regular upgrades/improvements.
- 33 municipalities were certified as "Municipality – Ready for Business" and began applying a professional approach to the field of economic development.
- A network of LED professionals and municipalities was created and strengthened.
- 17 Business Advisory Boards were established in participating municipalities.
- Short-term LED Action Plans were developed and regularly updated in all certified communities.
- Capacity in the area of local economic development was increased among the staff of participating municipalities. Example technical areas were as follows: assessment and utilization of community resources; marketing of a municipality and utilization of different marketing tools; business retention/expansion; and attraction of new business to the community.

Replication of good municipal government practices already adapted in Bulgaria in the field of infrastructure management:

- The replication of the Golden, CO public infrastructure management model was extended to eight new Bulgarian municipalities resulting in the development of asset and financial management plans for street maintenance and repair. The replication of the model provided for the effective spending of public money in the long term.
- Veliko Turnovo and Plovdiv expanded the replication program by applying the inventory/financial management plan to their bridge maintenance.
- The projects have increased the capacity of Bulgarian municipalities to prepare for and manage long-term infrastructure needs and directly support local economic development.

Replication and expansion of the Pilot Composting Program in rural areas:

- 19 municipalities introduced a pilot composting program, established one or more composting sites, conducted a public education campaign to inform citizens of the benefits of composting, and generated compost for use mostly in farming.

- Each composting site was equipped with containers for solid waste. Municipal officials and ecologists organized the regular turning of the piles with machinery.
- Program Financial Support (PFS) for composting replication projects was provided in the amount of BGN 33,000.
- A local Bulgarian non governmental organization (NGO), the Bulgarian Association of Municipal Environmental Experts (BAMEE), as well as the Ministry of the Environment, worked with the municipalities through the program to expand efforts and improve overall solid waste management practices in Bulgaria.
- The program was supported by US practitioners who have passed on their knowledge to Bulgarian practitioners. These Bulgarian practitioners are now delivering the training to their fellow Bulgarian community.
- In the past year, as result of the educational campaign, five municipalities deposited a total of 215 tons of bio waste (mainly vegetation and manure) on the sites.

Local Economic Development and Marketing Project Activities

As a priority area, economic development activities were the main focus of phase V. The activities moved towards using proactive municipal policy for economic development and building the capacity, in local economic development, for municipal administrations in Bulgaria. Activities resulted in broadening the understanding among involved municipal leaders and their community partners as to why local economic development is crucial for the development and future of each community.

The Bulgarian Local Economic Development Partnership (BLEDP), established in 2003, was gradually strengthened and expanded. Twenty-five new Bulgarian municipalities joined the Local Economic Development and Marketing Project in two consequent rounds: 15 municipalities joined the project in 2004-2005 and ten more joined in 2005-2006. By the end of the program, the BLEDP consolidated the efforts of 39 municipalities that had become more effective in working collectively and individually to bring economic development to their municipalities, promote their business climate, and recruit investments. The following municipalities were involved in the project: Aksakovo, Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Byala, Vratsa, Gabrovo, Gorna Malina, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Gotse Delchev, Dobrich, Karlovo, Knezha, Kozloduy, Kardzhali, Lovech, Mezdra, Montana, Panagyurishte, Pazardzhik, Pleven, Plovdiv, Pravets, Razgrad, Razlog, Rakovski, Ruse, Svilengrad, Sevlievo, Silistra, Sliven, Smolyan, Stara Zagora, Strazhitsa, Teteven, Tryavna, Targovishte, Haskovo, and Yambol.

The selection of new municipal participants was based on the proven commitment of these municipalities to institutionalize an economic development office or specialist position within the city administration and work transparently with the local business community. Each municipality's city council would then approve these changes to ensure implementation.

All activities were tailored to prepare for and assist participating municipalities in the application of a professional approach to local economic development. The specifics of how this was achieved are listed below.

1. Training

Each participating municipality created the position of an economic development specialist within the city administration and hired a candidate to fill this position. In order to help the specialists prepare for the new position, FLGR organized training with the support of US practitioners. More than 100 local economic development professionals received extensive, practice-oriented local economic development training. This resulted in an established pool of trained economic development professionals who were prepared and motivated to assist their communities in applying a professional approach to economic development on local level.

The following training courses were delivered:

-Three ten-day basic economic development training courses were delivered to newly selected participants in the Local Economic Development and Marketing Project. Participants were exposed to current economic development concepts. Each training course provided basic knowledge and skills for the management of an economic development office within a municipality.

- Two five-day advanced training courses were offered so that the participants could handle a business prospect and the related financial issues for setting up a partnership. These courses provided a more advanced level of knowledge for the participants.

- A series of one and a half day topical training seminars were delivered to help the participants further enhance their economic development and marketing skills. The topical training seminars assisted with the generation of economic development project ideas amongst the participants. They were also instrumental for the implementation of projects related to these topics such as the following: marketing and reuse of available sites and buildings; performance measurement; cost/benefit analysis; industrial park development; creation of economic development advisory boards; design and implementation of work force development programs; gray field and brown field redevelopment; how to prepare and upload information on the marketing web site invest.bg; business protocol and ethics; and the utilization of European Union (EU) funding sources for the implementation of economic development projects on local level. The trainings were delivered mainly by US practitioners: Phillip Dunlap, Megan McGowen, and Cary Cox - City of Auburn, AL; Gary O'Connell City of Charlottesville, VA; John Capelle - West Bend, WI; David Humphreys - West Carrollton, OH.

The assistance provided by US practitioners to FLGR led to the institutionalization of the training activities. The training courses were further developed into a comprehensive LED training program to be delivered by FLGR beyond the timeframe of the City Links Program and USAID financial support. This was achieved through training module development and the establishment of an extended Bulgarian economic development training team. US practitioners provided FLGR with the LED basic training modules and a LED basic training handbook. To assist with the development of both the modules and handbook, FLGR staff and the Bulgarian economic development specialists provided examples for the introduction of US practices into the Bulgarian environment and information on the existing FLGR modules. Additional training modules were developed for selected topics such as industrial parks development, creation of economic development advisory boards, marketing, and presentation skills to assist the Bulgarian trainers with delivery of comprehensive economic development training.

The capacity of the Bulgarian trainers was further strengthened through training of trainers (TOT) activities and tailored technical assistance. This pool of trainers could then deliver the basic economic development course and provide continuous education opportunities for LED specialists in Bulgaria. In 2006, the Bulgarian trainers were co-delivering the training courses with their fellow US practitioners; however, by 2007, the trainers delivered the courses on their own as a result of the transfer of expertise and development of their skills.

2. Internships

Twenty-nine internships were completed in US partner cities by economic development specialists from Bulgarian municipalities who had passed at least the basic certification level and FLGR staff. The following US cities and organizations hosted the Bulgarian interns: West Bend, WI; West Carrollton and Kettering, OH; Auburn, AL; San Bernardino County,

CA; Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation; Annapolis, MD; Washington Economic Development Partnership (WEDP); Phoenix, AR; Novi, MI; Thornton, CO; Arlington County, Arlington Economic Development Corporation, International Economic Development Council (IEDC), Charlottesville, and Winchester, VA; and Thornton, CO.

The internships enabled the Bulgarian specialists and FLGR staff to gain hands-on experience working with US economic development techniques that could be later adapted for the Bulgarian context. Over the course of the program, the internships resulted in strengthening the capacity of the respective municipal economic development offices as well as FLGR.

In addition to the US internships, four staff from FLGR attended the 2006 International Economic Development Council (IEDC) conference. The FLGR staff exchanged experiences and learned a great deal about the content and specifics of organizing an annual LED conference. In 2006, the FLGR staff began organizing an annual local economic development conference in Bulgaria.

Two annual economic development conferences were successfully implemented by FLGR under the program - in November 2006 and February 2008. The first annual conference, "Municipalities and Businesses – Partners for Economic Development," brought together 150 participants and the second, "Municipalities and Business - Partners for Economic Development" – a total of 180 participants. These conferences proved to be very well received and attended by local and central government officials, the business community, universities, and NGOs. In addition, the successful implementation of these conferences further promoted the image of FLGR as a leading economic development organization in Bulgaria.

3. Enhancement of the Marketing Program

Marketing efforts were expanded within Bulgaria and internationally. Bulgarian economic developers acquired knowledge and developed and improved their skills for the development of various marketing tools. Most of the participating municipalities started developing comprehensive marketing programs as part of their municipal strategies for attraction of new investment to their communities.

Fifty marketing materials such as brochures, leaflets, CDs, and DVDs were developed to assist Bulgarian municipalities in the implementation of their business attraction programs. Marketing materials were developed by new consortium members as well as by old consortium members who updated the marketing materials published in previous rounds of program implementation.

The development and publication of marketing materials by program participants was financially supported with Program Support Funds (PSF) in the amount of BGN 44,000. The marketing materials produced by program participants were utilized for marketing purposes such as the following: mailings to a target group of businesses; presentations to foreign commercial offices in Bulgaria; participation in trade shows; presentations to prospective businesses/investors visiting the municipality; and others.

Participation in trade shows was a special focus in the activities under the Local Economic Development Project. The Bulgarian Local Economic Development Partnership (BLEDP), through FLGR, participated in the following seven international trade shows in Bulgaria and in Europe: the 2004 Hanover International Trade Show in Germany; the 2005 EMPEX real estate show in Warsaw, Poland; five-time participation in the Plovdiv International Trade Fair in Bulgaria over the 2004-2006 period (both autumn and spring); and the 2007 SIMA

real estate show in Madrid, Spain. As several of these fairs were attended by a large number of attendees, participation provided great exposure for the BLEDP and FLGR. Over 700 business contacts were generated and BLEDP participating municipalities later received ten business inquiries from representatives of the following countries: Canada, Germany, US, Portugal, Turkey, and Italy. In addition, as a result of participation in the fairs and post fair proactive efforts, the BLEDP produced more than BGN 20 million in company expansions and the creation of more than 2,500 jobs.

A core element of the BLEDP marketing strategy was the development of the www.invest.bg website. Municipalities' experience in soliciting contacts with prospective investors indicated that the information should be categorized and published on the web to promote participating municipalities. As a result, the website www.invest.bg, was created as a marketing tool to assist municipalities in the generation of investor interest. Information on development and business opportunities both in Bulgaria and in each of the individual municipalities participating in the BLEDP was uploaded to the website. The website home page is being maintained by FLGR. However, the local economic development specialists draft and edit the other pages so that information available on lots and buildings; current and future investment and infrastructure projects; labor market and demographic data; information and advertisements for local companies; taxes and fees; municipal services; and news is up-to-date and current. An intranet system has been developed to provide the BLEDP members with a fast and convenient means of information exchange and communication. All 39 BLEDP participants launched their sub-pages on www.invest.bg by the end of the program. In addition, the web site was technologically improved and upgraded twice in order to make it more user friendly and ensure for its better positioning on the Internet.

On recommendation of the US practitioners, the FLGR started public relation marketing activities such as the following: an article on Bulgarian industrial parks was published in a Spanish real estate magazine and four BLEDP member municipalities - Gorna Oryahovitsa, Razgrad, Strajitsa, and Pleven participated in the fDi Magazine survey and 2007 competition "Best Places for Location." The four Bulgarian municipalities were included in the fDi Magazine atlas.

The FLGR activities and services in the field of economic development developed under the program were promoted in local and national media. Media coverage was provided through daily newspapers and participation in radio forums at the national radio station. This coverage was often dedicated to the partnership between US and Bulgarian municipalities.

Lastly, the FLGR conducted meetings with representatives from the commercial offices of foreign embassies to Bulgaria. These meetings focused on the promotion of BLEDP. Contacts were made and maintained with the commercial offices of the US, Germany, Italy, France, Ireland, Great Britain, Austria, and China.

4. Establishment of Regional Replication and Expansion of the Certification Program – Basic and Excellent Levels

The Certification Program "Municipality Ready for Business" was initiated in 2003 and during the fourth phase of the program, it was further developed. Phase V utilized the certification program as an effective tool for introducing the professional approach to economic development on local level; strengthening the capacity of participating municipalities to use proactive municipal economic development programs; and creating greater investment recruitment opportunities and new jobs.

By the end of the program, thirty-three Bulgarian municipalities were certified and seven of them were given the “excellence” level after meeting the following criteria:

Basic Requirements for Certification

1. Establishment of a professional economic development office within the municipality staffed with a trained economic development specialist (s). The office is separate, distinct, and institutionalized. The economic development specialist must have completed the 100 hour basic training program and is committed to a continuing education program, for example 20hrs/year
2. Political Statement from mayor and city council
 - a. Commitment to economic development /non-political
 - b. Commitment to a code of ethics
3. Economic Development Action Plan (short-term, two-three years) developed
4. Self assessment of municipal resources and potential for economic development – accurate/verified and periodically updated
5. Marketing materials prepared and maintained (in Bulgarian and in English/ and or other foreign languages like German, French, and others)
6. Business retention/expansion visitation program- developed and being implemented
7. Basic profile of major businesses and products within the municipality (in Bulgarian and in English)
8. The economic developer of the municipality is member of the BLEDP
9. Collaborative marketing www.invest.bg website participation

Additional Criteria for Certification with Excellence

1. Extensive inventory of sites/buildings/ownership/infrastructure/existing businesses is developed
2. Detailed work force analysis and work force development program is designed and operational
3. Expanded profile on businesses, products, and distributors (in Bulgarian and English)
4. Economic Development Advisory Team (EDAT) established– the basic version includes representatives of key businesses (private sector) and citizen groups staffed with at least one trained economic development specialist (trained through the program)

Based on the successes of the certification program implementation, municipalities new to the partnership were mentored by already trained and successfully functioning municipalities. Each mentor municipality was assigned to work with two new municipalities. The preparation for basic certification was led by FLGR and core Bulgarian municipal experts. The US practitioner resource group provided limited technical assistance with regard to preparation for certification. The US practitioners advised the municipalities on how to develop their economic development strategies. The FLGR staff and Bulgarian mentor municipalities assisted the new municipalities with the self-assessment of their local economic development assets as well as how the greater community could get more involved. After the basic tasks were completed, each group of newly selected municipalities designated economic development specialists. These specialists enrolled in training, completed their self-assessment, drafted this information for the website, and created an economic development plan. Municipalities awarded with basic certification were involved in specific project implementation either through replication or working directly with US partner cities.

Technical compliance with the certification criteria was verified by site visits. From 2004-2007, the certification visits were conducted by US practitioners, representatives of FLGR, and the Bulgarian Investments Agency. The FLGR took ownership of the certification

program implementation in 2007 and from that time, conducted the certification visits with representatives of the Bulgarian Investments Agency only.

Certification efforts continued after the basic certification award. The municipalities that had been certified at the basic level were asked to participate in the mentorship replication activities in the next round of certification. The goal for these municipalities was to prepare for and get certified with the “excellence” level rating. These municipalities perfected their knowledge and learned new municipal marketing techniques; educated themselves on how to use municipal marketing as a resource that can help the local government meet capital and operating needs; and expanded their skills on business retention and expansion. The municipalities of Silistra, Dobrich, Gabrovo, Haskovo, Strazhitsa, Pleven, and Vratsa were awarded with a certificate of “excellence.” They were then offered and later utilized funding of up to BGN 10 000 from the Partnership Support Fund (PSF) provided under program. The PSF supported the implementation of significant economic development projects that were initiated and developed with US technical assistance. The economic development projects of the six municipalities listed above focused on the development of new or redevelopment/improvement of existing industrial zones.

Certification awards took place annually. Every municipality had to re-certify on a bi-annual basis. Eighteen municipalities applied for and were awarded with re-certification for another three year period with an expiration date beyond the end of the program.

6. Specific project implementation and technical assistance

Based on specific projects that the Bulgarian municipalities were implementing or replicating, US practitioners provided additional on-site technical assistance to their Bulgarian partners. Examples of the variety of projects implemented or replicated are listed below.

- To support businesses in existing industrial zones, infrastructure improvement projects were jointly developed in Dobrich, Vratsa, Gabrovo, and Plovdiv.
- Step on step methodology for the establishment of Economic Development Advisory Boards was applied by a large group of municipalities and as a result, 17 advisory boards were established.
- Projects for industrial / business parks development were developed in Silistra, Haskovo, Kozloduy, Gotse Delchev, Strajitza, Gorna Oriahovitsa, Lovech, Svilengrad, Aksakovo, Gorna Malina, Montana, and Pazardjik.
- Development of sports and recreation as well as tourist attraction projects were implemented Razgrad and Karlovo.
- Rakovski, Panagiuriste, Stara Zagora, Montana, Svilengrad, Pleven, and Ruse drafted marketing strategies.
- Projects in support of small or medium sized enterprises were developed in Sevlievo, Yambol, and Smolyan.
- Development and implementation of workforce development programs was completed in Rakovski, Haskovo, and Gabrovo.
- Economic development strategies were drafted by Teteven, Dobrich, and Pleven.
- Pleven developed a strategy for foreign investment attraction and a conference center.

Activities under the Program Component “Replication of Good Municipal Government Practices Already Adapted to the Bulgarian Environment” - Public Infrastructure Management Model

The public infrastructure management model, developed by Golden, Colorado, was adopted in Veliko Turnovo during previous phases of the program. As a result, Veliko Turnovo has completed a map of all roads and sidewalks; ranked the roads and sidewalks in accordance with their condition; projected the repair costs for the mapped area; developed a rational financial management plan that gave reliable information as to how money is required for the upkeep of the infrastructure; and determined what is necessary to fully repair all the roads and sidewalks. The public infrastructure management model was successfully replicated in the six districts of Plovdiv, the second largest city in Bulgaria.

The financial plan allowed the municipality of Veliko Turnovo and Plovdiv to make informed decisions, apply for bank credits, and allocate the necessary funds for the implementation of the financial plan within the municipal budget. During Bulgaria’s European Union accession negotiations and after the actual accession, new opportunities for the development of municipal infrastructure were provided to the local governments. This is the reason why the Bulgarian municipalities participating in the program paid special attention to replication of the Golden, CO public infrastructure management model.

The successful replication of the model in Plovdiv proved that the Golden, CO methodology did ensure cost savings for Bulgarian municipalities. The methodology demonstrated that setting aside capital funds for preventative measures now would greatly benefit the municipality in the long-term. Replication activities for other Bulgarian municipalities were organized in two rounds. For each round, each group received initial training and onsite technical assistance to apply the public infrastructure management model. As a result of the training and onsite technical assistance, asset and financial management plans were drafted for street and sidewalk maintenance by nine municipalities - Tundja, Petrich, Svistov, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Berkovitsa, Svilengrad, Sevlievo, and Straldja. These replication municipalities utilized the Partnership Support Fund, in the amount of BGN 18,000, to support their project implementation. The funds were utilized for the purchase of computers, digital cameras, mapping equipment, kilometer signs and meters, asphalt thermometers, and other types of small equipment related to the specific projects. The municipalities of Tundzha and Straldzha also drafted plans but inserted an additional step by including maintenance for municipal roads outside their cities.

Dan Hartman, US practitioner/Public Works Director from Golden, CO, together with his Veliko Turnovo and Plovdiv partners delivered three training courses to municipal leaders and city engineers from the replication municipalities. The training courses were attended by 53 municipal officials from 25 Bulgarian municipalities.

A team of Bulgarian mentors, consisting of seven engineers from the municipalities of Veliko Turnovo, Plovdiv, Svistov and Tundja, was established for the entire duration of phase V. The team increased their knowledge and expertise by applying the Golden, CO public infrastructure management model and providing on-going technical assistance for project development and implementation to the replication municipalities. For the provision of the on-going technical assistance under this component, Plovdiv and Veliko Turnovo signed contracts with FLGR.

US practitioners, together with the Bulgarian mentors, paid several visits to new replication municipalities in order to provide consultation and additional training to assist them in project replication. This particular program component for replication of the public infrastructure

management model did not include travel to the US since the basic expertise already existed within Bulgaria. However, internship opportunities were offered in Veliko Turnovo and Plovdiv for the new city engineers from the replication cities. Several internships were completed by the new replication cities as a result. These internships provided the opportunity to study the details of project implementation within a Bulgarian context/environment. In 2005, the City of Golden, CO hosted a group of Bulgarian city engineers and mentors from Veliko Turnovo, Plovdiv and Tundja for a study tour. The study tour was co-financed by the Bulgarian municipalities and only very limited financial support came from the program. The study tour increased the city engineers and mentors' understanding and knowledge of the leading US public infrastructure management practices so that they could make preparations for developing their own sustainable replication model in the future.

The capacity of the Bulgarian team of mentors was also strengthened by the provision of training of trainers (TOT). Training modules for further project replication were developed by US practitioner Dan Hartman with input from Bulgarian experts as well.

The municipalities of Veliko Turnovo, Svistov, Plovdiv, and Gorna Oryahovitsa continued implementing their financial plans by securing funding for the planned street repairs. The Municipality of Veliko Turnovo secured bank credits in the amount of BGN 10 million, the Municipality of Plovdiv - BGN 50 million, the municipality of Svistov - BGN 3million, and the municipality of Gorna Oriahovitsa - BGN 4 million. Public infrastructure repairs were executed in the four cities to that effect.

Wide dissemination on the best practices developed under the public infrastructure management replication activities was made through the LOGIN data base, FLGR newsletter, FLGR web site, and during a special plenary session at the 2007 final best practices symposium held in Varna.

Due to the significance of the Golden, CO public management infrastructure model's impact on improvement, Veliko Turnovo and Plovdiv expanded the model's application to cover other infrastructure needs. During this program phase, both municipalities completed the development of a long-term bridge management and maintenance program with Golden, CO. Veliko Turnovo and Plovdiv completed bridge inventory as planned by assessing the bridges' current technical condition, their expected lifespan, and traffic safety. Veliko Turnovo also worked with geographic information systems (GIS) to analyze the bridge inventory information. Financial plans for bridge management, maintenance and replacement were developed. Reconstruction designs were developed for two bridges in Plovdiv as well as for the construction of a new one. In 2007, the Municipality of Plovdiv started bridge maintenance construction.

Activities for Replication of the Pilot Composting Program in Rural Areas

During the previous program phases, three rural municipalities - Elhovo, Boljarovo and Tundja worked together to develop a joint solution to their solid waste management issues. As a result, the three municipalities started a composting program to reduce the volume of solid waste that needed to be disposed in a landfill thus providing a workable solution to their issues. Under this program phase, Sarah Phillips, Village Manager of Johnstown, OH provided technical assistance for the replication of the composting program.

Nineteen additional rural municipalities participated in the replication activities because of its strong impact, potential for further replication, and low cost. The composting program was successfully replicated in the municipalities of Sliven, Maritsa, Chirpan, Rakovski,

Panagiuriste, Knezha, Pravets, Kaloyanovo, Straldja, Rakovski, Radnevo, Hisar, Vurshets, Rodopi, Veliki Preslav, Smiadovo, Dobrichka, Pazardjik, and Novi Iskar. To assist with replication of the pilot composting program, the FLGR subcontracted the provision of technical assistance and coordination of activities to the Bulgarian Association of Environmental Experts (BAMEE). Successful implementation of the pilot composting program was also achieved with the assistance of the environmental experts from the Municipalities of Tundzha and Bolyarovo. Together, the environmental experts and BAMEE mentored the new replication cities. To provide for better use of the composting techniques and the successful dissemination of project results, experts from the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Waters and local Bulgarian NGOs were also recruited. As result, BAMEE, in partnership with the Ministry of the Environment, the municipalities, and local Bulgarian NGOs expanded their efforts and improved overall solid waste management practices in Bulgaria. The replication activities proved that solutions that are not expensive or complex may be used to achieve good results in solid and agricultural waste management.

The 19 additional rural municipalities introduced pilot composting programs by establishing one or more composting sites. Each municipality decided how many composting sites to establish and where to locate them. The composting sites were equipped with containers for solid waste. The 19 municipalities prepared the composting sites by utilizing BGN 33,000 of the Program Support Funds. These funds were spent on purchasing containers for the composting sites, grading the sites, and planting fast-growing vegetation that would later serve as a natural fence. The 19 municipalities organized educational campaigns among citizens to ensure for their participation in the separation of solid waste from organic waste. The purpose of this separation was to reduce the solid waste disposed at landfills and to eliminate the small, illegal dumps in the villages. As part of an education campaign, 12,500 leaflets/educational brochures were printed with program support and disseminated to citizens. Many of the municipalities also used the local media as part of their citizen education campaign. For the most part, the citizens demonstrated an understanding about the importance of waste separation and cooperated with the municipalities. Compost from the organic waste was available at the sites for citizen use. It was utilized for farming, forestry, and fish breeding in artificial lakes. Since 2007, as result of the educational campaign, five municipalities deposited a total of 215 tons of organic waste (mainly vegetation and manure) on the sites.

Lessons learned and positive experiences for introduction and development of a composting program in rural areas was shared at three events after each round of replication and the 2007 best practices symposium in Varna. One of the plenary sessions at best practices symposium was dedicated to the replication of the pilot composting program best practices. This session was attended by 40 symposium participants.

As of August 2007, upon completion of contract obligations, BAMEE took over the post program and future replication of the composting program. The BAMEE is expected to continue providing support to interested Bulgarian municipalities for further project replication as part of its overall association activities.

Best Practices Symposium

On June 11-12, 2007, a Best Practices Symposium, "Get Ready for Business," was held in Varna, Bulgaria. The symposium was dedicated to ten years of Bulgarian – US Partnership as well as the results achieved and projects completed under the fifth and final phase of the program. "During the last three years of the program, 2,500 new jobs were created, 120 million Euro investments were attracted in new business projects, and 20 million Euro - for

expansion of existing businesses," highlighted Mrs. Ginka Kapitanova, the Executive Director of FLGR.

The symposium was attended by 120 people - guests and representatives from over 50 municipalities - mayors, chairs of municipal councils, municipal experts; representatives of regional governments; NGOs; and the business sector. The symposium provided a great opportunity for participants to share their experiences on how to do the following: support local and foreign companies; create new jobs; market the municipality as a business and tourist destination; prepare for and acquire the "Municipality - Ready for Business" certification; replicate successful models for infrastructure management; and replicate projects for source separation, composting, and improvement of the waste management in rural areas.

A competition that simulated negotiations between city officials and prospective businesses for the site selection process was held during the symposium. The competition was organized for municipalities participating in the Local Economic Development and Marketing Project. The competition included presentations based on a case study disseminated among participants in advance and the demonstration, "Visit of a Prospect in the Municipality." The jury included US practitioners, FLGR, InvestBulgaria Agency, and the Tishman Management Company - Bulgaria. The Municipality of Haskovo won the competition.

Mr. Michael Fritz, USAID Mission Director, presented awards to the US and Bulgarian municipalities participating in the program as well as to the US and Bulgarian practitioners for their extraordinary commitment; successful replication of good governance practices; and provision of technical assistance for project development and training delivery.

III. SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND THE PROGRAM

The FLGR, in consultation with the US practitioners from the LED component, prepared and started implementing strategic steps to phase out USAID financial support and to ensure for sustainability of the organization beyond the program. A draft business plan was developed for a two year period beyond the program in preparation for the sustainable development of FLGR activities mainly in the area of LED. The business plan was based on the expertise gained by FLGR staff throughout the implementation of the program. It also included the input of the expanded economic development practitioners' team - the institutionalization of their program as well as their capacity as trainers. Under the program, technical assistance for the development of the draft business plan was provided by two US practitioners - Jeffrey Finkle, International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Director and Brian McGowen, Economic Development Director, Ontario County, CA. Basic guidelines for future operation as well as financing requirements and options were drafted. The plan was further developed by FLGR and focused on the following.

1. Further Development of the Bulgarian Local Economic Development Partnership (BLEDP) as Core Economic Development Organization on Local Level

Building upon the successes of the program's fifth and final phase, the efforts of the FLGR focused on further developing the BLEDP and providing a platform for the institutionalization of the LED technical assistance and training.

At the 2007 best practices symposium, the FLGR announced that it will continue to coordinate and support the BLEDP, lead pro-active economic development programs, and provide professional services to municipalities and businesses. The following goal of the

BLEDP was set as result of consultations between the FLGR, US practitioners, and potential partnership members:

Goal: To consolidate the efforts of member municipalities in the field of marketing, investment recruitment, implementation of long-term and flexible policies for improvement of the investment climate, and generation of new, high quality jobs.

The FLGR offered a package of services to participants in the BLEDP that included the following.

- Management, marketing, demand-driven improvements and maintenance, and updates to the home page general information for the www.invest.bg website.
- Current information and consultancies on current and upcoming opportunities for the municipalities so that their economic projects could be financed through the EU and other institutions.
- Provision of information on upcoming economic events in Bulgaria and abroad.
- Timely, high quality responses to business inquiries that will then be provided in a summary to BLEDP participants.
- Services in the area of city administration organizational development and training to economic development specialists will be provided at preferential prices.
- Organization of professional and informational meetings for the economic development specialist team.
- Maintenance of contact with institutions related to economic development.

As result of the aggressive marketing campaigns over July-September 2007 and early 2008, the FLGR signed contracts for the provision of an annual service package with the following nineteen municipalities: Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Pazardjik, Aksakovo, Dobrich, Silistra, Ruse, Razgrad, Strajitsa, Pleven, Sevlievo, Lovech, Teteven, Knezha, Mezdra, Vratsa, Gorna Malina, Montana, and Gorna Oriahovitsa. The addition of these nineteen municipalities formed the new and future BLEDP. The service provision fee and coordination of the BLEDP members was determined by the member municipalities' population and ranged from BGN 2000 to BGN 6000.

Because of the fall 2007 local elections in Bulgaria, some of the municipalities postponed the decision to become members of the BLEDP. During the program's final six months, the FLGR conducted six regional meetings to re-establish relations with newly elected municipal leadership as result of the local elections and promote the FLGR's services in the field of local economic development. As a result, in March 2008, a contract with the Pazardjik Municipality was signed. Twelve additional municipalities declared interest in joining the BLEDP. Follow up meetings were scheduled to discuss future business opportunities and possibly gain more members.

The FLGR prepared and offered municipalities other services under individual contracts such as the following: conducting feasibility studies, developing marketing strategies, writing proposals, providing consultation for application to the EU's operational program funding, planning for economic development action, marketing for municipalities, training and organizational and professional development, and consulting for infrastructure management projects related to road infrastructure management and maintenance.

Two promotional brochures were developed and printed to assist FLGR's efforts for marketing these services beyond the program.

The FLGR, per the services outlined in the contract signed with BLEDP members, developed the annual service delivery plan for member municipalities; developed and introduced a new

concept for the www.invest.bg website; and began disseminating the electronic LED newsletter. The e-newsletter is being disseminated biweekly and provides information in the following categories: business inquiries, economic analysis and surveys, funding opportunities, upcoming events (BLEDP and other organizations related to economic development), competitions, and economic development best practices at the local level. The LED e-newsletter is being submitted only to BLEDP members.

Established by the program, BLEDP proved its ability to continue functioning as a self-sustaining consortium/network, lead by FLGR, after the program-supported period was over. BLEDP began successfully offering valuable services and is maintaining an outreach campaign to explain the value of its membership for further expansion.

2. Proposal Writing and New Project Development

The following proposals were prepared and submitted in order to utilize new sources of funding beyond the program.

- The FLGR, in consultation with the Auburn, AL partners, prepared a proposal titled “Development and Implementation of a Work Force Development Program on a Local/Regional Level Based on the Needs’ Assessment of Local Businesses.” This proposal was submitted to the Bulgarian Ministry of Labor and Social Works.
- A proposal was submitted and approved by the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy for the delivery of regional LED basic seminars focusing on establishment of economic development offices within Bulgarian municipal administrations.
- Another proposal was submitted and approved by the Bulgarian Ministry of Labor and Social Works for support to the Municipality of Letnitsa to strengthen its capacity for development and implementation of effective economic development policies and programs. Extensive training of the municipal employees, development of the economic development plan of the municipality, and development of marketing materials was provided by FLGR.
- “Development of a Preliminary Study as Part of the Feasibility Study for Development of an Industrial and Logistics Park in the Municipality of Svilengrad” was contracted and implemented with funding from the Municipality of Svilengrad. The project’s final report was positively accepted by the Svilengrad municipal management team. The completion of the feasibility study for the industrial park allowed the municipality to successfully apply for EU funding for the design and development of the park’s infrastructure.
- Proposals for delivery of consultancy services were submitted by FLGR to businesses such as the following: marketing services to the Industrial Zone of Kuklen and the IMMO Industries Group.
- FLGR provided consultancy and technical assistance for establishment of twinning relationships between municipalities.
- For cross border economic development and marketing initiatives between the Svoge Municipality and its Serbian partners, FLGR gave support.
- FLGR coordinated with two international companies to draft a proposal for the management of a civil society development grant scheme.

3. Delivery of Training Services Based on the Comprehensive Economic Development Training Program Developed and Institutionalized under the City Links Program

In 2007, the FLGR staff began providing LED basic training services as part of its legacy mechanism. Examples of how FLGR started building its legacy are listed below.

- A six day LED basic training course was delivered in partnership with the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG). Nineteen representatives from Bulgarian municipalities, local NGOs, and local private companies participated in the training course. Again in

partnership with AUBG, another six day LED basic training course is currently scheduled for May-mid June 2008.

- Two-day LED basic training courses were delivered to 180 municipal officials in November – December 2007. These courses raised the Bulgarian city officials' awareness of current LED concepts and practices as well as introduced the professional approach to LED. The training was delivered under a contract and with funding provided by the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy.

Both of the trainings mentioned above were conducted based on the training modules developed with US practitioners under the program. The feedback from participants was very positive. The successful completion of the training courses proved that the FLGR and expanded LED team had increased their expertise enough to deliver the LED training beyond program support.

- A study tour, "Industrial Parks Development and Management," to Czech Republic was organized in 2007. This tour was paid for and attended by twelve municipal officials, LED practitioners, and business representatives.

4. Networking and Expanding the Linkages with Other Economic Development Organizations and Central Government Institutions

The program continued building bridges with the central government institutions such as the Bulgarian Investment Agency, the Ministry of Economy and Energy, and the State Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises. It is expected that joint marketing efforts will take place periodically and resources from central and local governments will enable the BLEDP to launch an effective marketing strategy and investment program.

The FLGR took the initiative to extend contacts to other organizations in order to ensure for a broader base for networking in the field of economic development. The FLGR was accepted as member of AmCham in Bulgaria, established a partnership with the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria, and signed a partnership agreement with the Chamber of Commerce of Brindisi, Italy. Regular meetings with commercial offices of foreign embassies in Sofia generated investment interest in the BLEDP member municipalities but eventually developed into a larger platform for BLEDP. These meetings provided opportunities for cross-border municipal cooperation and the joint development of projects under the EU structural funds. The FLGR team strengthened its relationships with the commercial offices of the US, China, Ireland, France, and Great Britain.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Throughout the implementation of the program's fifth and final phase, human/skill/resource capacity was built within FLGR and its participating Bulgarian municipalities.

Bulgarian practitioners initially involved in the development and adoption of successful US management models gradually developed their capacity and began to play a decisive role for further dissemination of the US experience within their own and surrounding municipalities. US practitioners participated mainly as mentors and advisors - not providing full scale technical support. In this way, the program contributed to the professional development of Bulgarian practitioners and FLGR. The Bulgarian practitioners and FLGR, in turn, invested a lot of creativity and enthusiasm into their respective training and projects; accumulated expertise, knowledge, and skills; and became prepared to continue implementing the ideas and successful approaches learned from the US partners.

FLGR has grown into a major economic development support organization for local governments in Bulgaria. The program consolidated the technical skills of FLGR staff and they became experts in local economic development as well as practitioners who the municipalities trust and solicit advice.

The FLGR staff and seven local economic development specialists involved in the implementation of the Local Economic Development and Marketing Project were trained as trainers/ consultants. This training enabled them to acquire sufficient technical expertise to independently certify Bulgarian municipalities as “Ready for Business” upon program completion. The FLGR staff and LED specialists can also support Bulgarian municipalities in the development of economic development activities and projects beyond program support.

The LED technical assistance and training has been institutionalized in FLGR and specifically BLEDP. The BLEDP was developed and introduced to respond to the common needs of Bulgarian municipalities to enhance their LED skills and potentially, bring new jobs to their communities. This partnership has empowered 39 Bulgarian local governments to better prepare their communities for economic development by application of a professional approach and an improvement in the business climate. Critical for the selection of new participating municipalities was the proven commitment of municipal leadership to institutionalize the economic development office/ or economic development specialist position within the city administration. The municipal leadership also had to work transparently with the local business community. City Council decisions were made to support both of these efforts. The partnership developed into a strong platform to attract private investment to Bulgarian municipalities and encourage business climate improvements, thus creating new job opportunities and economic growth.

The program was demand driven, designed, and implemented. This was the key for its success.

The Partnership Support Fund (PSF) provided access to money for individual project implementation. The availability of these funds enabled the recipients to produce better results.

Transparency – the models that were adapted, disseminated, and/or replicated for Bulgarian municipalities under the program were transparent and open to review by the citizens. Increased public awareness should be considered at all implementation stages. USAID strongly encouraged delivery of specific presentations (LED plans, infrastructure management plans, municipal marketing profiles, etc.) to municipal councils, the local business community, and media.

The fifth and final phase of the program ensured for wide information dissemination. With assistance from the US practitioners, a variety of new practices and models were disseminated throughout Bulgaria at seminars, training events, trade shows and fairs, conferences, and the best practices symposium.