



**Final Report**  
**SLOVAKIA: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**  
**USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-A-00-94-00028-00**  
**January 1, 1996 to December 31, 1998**

**I. SUMMARY**

Since attaining independence in 1993 until the September 1998 parliamentary and local elections, Slovakia was governed almost exclusively by Vladimir Meciar and the Democratic Movement for Slovakia (HzDS). During this period, the country's transition to democracy had been in jeopardy. As neighboring countries rushed to join western political, economic, and security structures, based in part on their proven commitment to democratic norms, the Meciar government pursued increasingly authoritarian policies, subjugating the rule of law in order to perpetuate its own power. Government-sponsored political, and at times physical, attacks on opponents in government, parliament, the judiciary, media, and the third sector betrayed the principles on which the Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution had been based and produced deep polarization in society.

During this troubled political period the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) decided to implement its community organizing program. The program's goals were to train a group of Slovaks in the principles and tactics of American neighborhood organizing, who would in turn help empower citizens in city districts and villages vis-à-vis their locally elected officials. The program built on the successes of NDI's earlier National Endowment for Democracy (NED)-funded civic programming in Trencin and Presov. Launched in the central Slovak city of Banska Bystrica, the community organizing program expanded to three communities in that city as well as to districts in the cities of Zvolen, Nitra, Zilina, and Lucenec and a group of villages in area the southern town of Litava.

The community organizing program has three distinct phases: The first phase, from April 1996 to August 1997, established community organizing as an accepted and sustainable political practice in Slovakia. The second, from September 1997 to July 1998, was a period of growth, in which the program expanded to other communities outside of central Slovakia. The third phase, from July 1998 to June 1999, was one of consolidation. By the end of this cooperative agreement, the program had completed its second phase and began its third and final phase. The latter half of the third phase is to continue under NDI's current cooperative agreement with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



## II. BACKGROUND

Vladimir Meciar and his Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HzDS) had led Slovakia to independence from Czechoslovakia in 1993 and governed the nation for most of the period up until the September 1998 parliamentary elections.<sup>1</sup> The Meciar government had been associated with an increasingly blatant pattern of subjugation of the rule of law to that government's political agenda. The list of misdeeds included the subversion of the May 1997 referendum on NATO expansion and direct presidential elections<sup>2</sup>, the Gaulieder affair<sup>3</sup>, economic blackmail, dubious privatization, politicization of pivotal government bodies and portfolios, such as the Slovak Intelligence Service and public education, the removal of the parliamentary opposition from any significant supervisory or legislative role, a hostile legal position toward nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the denial of cultural autonomy to Slovakia's ethnic Hungarians and Roma.

The government's stance toward other legitimate political voices had been characterized as harkening back to the old communist adage, "those who are not with us are against us." Indeed, many Slovaks feared government reprisals against legitimate criticism, which HzDS termed "anti-Slovak" sentiment. Moreover, the country's society became deeply polarized. Pro-government and pro-opposition groups existed in nearly all sectors of the public domain.

In Slovakia, as in many countries where NDI is engaged in political development, the image of political parties has been negative. After years of one party rule, with party membership practically obligatory, many citizens reject the involvement in party politics. In contrast, civic organizations offered an alternative and less threatening avenue for citizens to engage in the political process. Unfortunately, the development of a civil society in Slovakia had been stifled. This was in large part due to people's expectations, based on experience, that government alone controls the political life of the country. The Meciar government, in its own interest, reinforced this mentality. Because Slovak citizens were not aware of the constructive forms of civic activism, they were readily manipulated by that government's heavy-handed actions.

The decision to implement a community organizing program in Slovakia was based on a number of factors. First, NDI had successfully implemented a variant of community

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<sup>1</sup> Meciar's government lost a no-confidence vote in March 1994; however, Meciar was returned to power after receiving 35 percent of the votes cast in the October 1994 parliamentary elections.

<sup>2</sup> After the opposition succeeded in placing a question on direct presidential elections on the referendum, and following the Constitutional Court's ruling that the question was legitimate and the voters' decision binding, the Ministry of the Interior deliberately left the question off the ballot, directly usurping the Court's ruling and causing the entire referendum to be compromised.

<sup>3</sup> Frantisek Gaulieder, a member of parliament with HzDS, resigned from the party in December 1996, and was consequently expelled from parliament by party leaders. Slovakia's Constitutional Court ruled that Mr. Gaulieder should have his parliamentary mandate restored, but the government refused to abide by the Court's ruling.

organizing in the cities of Trencin and Presov. In both instances, NDI was able to create coalitions of civic groups and organizations that galvanized citizens to present their concerns vis-à-vis locally elected officials. The Trencin-based operation also launched the country's first-ever candidate forums, in which those vying for public office debated each other over issues of substance. Second, NDI felt that it would be prudent to avoid a confrontational situation with the Meciar government given its hostile attitude toward all those who opposed it; hence, the Institute decided to implement a program that appeared innocuous on the surface and would therefore attract less attention from the government. Third, NDI viewed this type of programming as an optimal way to jump start the development of civil society, which had been stifled under the communist system and Meciar government. NDI felt that the development of community civic groups would in turn provide the underpinnings for the development of democratic institutions.

In April 1996, NDI began to identify and then train a group of Slovaks in implementing community organizing projects at the local level and identifying community leaders. NDI believed that non-partisan political involvement on immediate, local issues would lead to larger broader interventions by citizens at the national level by building on political skills and confidence gradually.

### **III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

To help encourage citizen participation in the political process and to foster democratic change from within in Slovakia, NDI sought to make community organizing a sustainable practice. When NDI set out to implement its program, conventional wisdom indicated that a minimum of three years would be required to build the critical mass of leadership and experience necessary to make community organizing a sustainable practice. This estimate was based on the time required to develop the requisite political and organizational skills, which were principally acquired through hands-on experience in forming neighborhood organizations and in implementing issue-based campaigns. Consequently, NDI approached its programming in three distinct phases.

In the program's first year (April 1996 to August 1997), the foundation was laid for the long-term development of community organizing as an accepted, sustainable, political practice in Slovakia. In the second phase (September 1997 to August 1998), the program took on new organizers, expanded into two new cities, and initiated a rural organizing effort. The objectives of the third and final phase, which overlap with this and NDI's current cooperative agreement, the of the program are: 1) to create an umbrella organization to assist community groups with fundraising and planning and to offer training and technical assistance; 2) to develop those community organizations affiliated with NDI into self-sustaining entities that effectively represent the people of their communities; 3) to develop a strategy for conducting joint organizing initiatives on issues that have a nationwide impact.

NDI has been working with civic organizations that it helped create in cities throughout Slovakia, and rural villages in the south of the country.

<i>Organizer</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Years operating</i>
<b>Olga Moravikova</b>	<b>Sasova district, Banska Bystrica</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Kayo Zboril</b>	<b>Zvolen-zapad neighborhood, Zvolen</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Maria Kamasova</b>	<b>Rural area surrounding Litava</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Anna Karailieva</b>	<b>NGO Coalition, Banska Bystrica</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Drahamira Kucekova</b>	<b>Lucenec</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Bohdan Smieska</b>	<b>Chrenova neighborhood, Nitra</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Helena Strmenova</b>	<b>Klokocina neighborhood, Nitra</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Vladimir Sedo</b>	<b>Sidlisko district, Banska Bystrica</b>	<b>1</b>

### *Program Launch*

In March 1996, NDI launched its community organizing program in Slovakia beginning with the deployment of Resident Representative Charles Hirt. Mr. Hirt worked for more than twenty years in community organizing and community development in Cincinnati, holding leadership positions in many of the leading civic groups. After meeting with USAID and State Department representatives in Washington and leading Slovak and western NGOs in Bratislava, an NDI team traveled to four Slovak cities (Banska Bystrica, Presov, Kosice, and Lucenec) to assess the extent and nature of citizen involvement in local affairs. The team analyzed the level of NGO political participation, the willingness of the local government to accommodate citizen interests, and the potential contribution that community organizing could make in encouraging Slovaks to participate actively in the political process. During this assessment, NDI identified Banska Bystrica as the city that most appropriately fit these prerequisites and thus identified it as a base from which to launch the program.

Shortly thereafter, NDI met with NGO and local government leaders to initiate constructive relationships crucial for fostering an understanding and cooperative attitude between civic groups and government officials and established relationships with civic groups throughout Slovakia. While conducting these meetings, NDI selected three civic leaders with standing in the community to serve as consultants for the program. In addition, NDI selected five individuals within the program who had expressed interest in community-related issues to be trained in neighborhood-based organizing.<sup>4</sup>

In the following months, NDI conducted formal training sessions on community organizing for the selected participants and finalized their specific organizing assignments. Training sessions focused on the basics of community organizing, the structure and functioning of local government, the role of civic groups, and the relationships between

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<sup>4</sup> NDI developed a core group of community organizers, expanding the number of organizers during the course of the program. The relationship and interactions between community organizers, community leaders, active participants, and city officials is elaborated in a chart included as an attachment.

governmental institutions and community organizations. NDI also introduced methods for cultivating leadership within the community, issue identification, and strategy development.<sup>5</sup>

### *Community Organizations*

Trained in the fundamentals of community organizing, four of the five community organizers initiated community organizing programs with operations in the Sasova neighborhood of Banska Bystrica, Zvolen zapad, and Lucenec. The fifth organizer began work with a coalition of NGOs to promote community-based issues in the Banska Bystrica and Zvolen areas. During extensive interviews with community residents, organizers identified practical concerns and began discussions with potential community leaders to spearhead organizing activities. Initial public meetings were convened to translate citizen concerns and interests into concrete issues and develop campaign strategies. All organizers continued to meet weekly with Resident Representative Charles Hirt in individual mentoring sessions as well as engaging in periodic collective meetings to gain comparative perspective.

In order to further explain the development and activities of individual community organizing groups, they have been categorized according to when they were established. Third-year organizations include those groups initiated under the first five organizers in 1997. This includes the group in Zvolen-zapad and the Sasova district near Banska Bystrica. The NGO group in Banska Bystrica and the organization in Lucenec have been categorized first-year organizations due to a lull in activities resulting from the loss of the initial organizers and the rehire of new organizers.

### *Third-Year Organizations*

Kajo Zboril and Milan Hronec, who coordinated the Citizens Initiative group in *Zvolen-zapad*, organized community leaders on a project to improve the condition of sidewalks in front of the town school, located in a high density traffic area in the center of town. After a series of meetings and coordinated lobbying efforts, the group was able to convince the mayor and members of the city council to attend a town hearing. Recognizing that substantial community support would lend legitimacy to the group's demands, more than 100 citizens from the neighborhood were recruited to attend the forum. At the meeting, the Mayor agreed to the citizens' request.<sup>6</sup>

The Zvolen-zapad committee was later invited to participate in an advisory capacity on discussions regarding the refurbishment and revitalization of the entire square, which eventually resulted in the construction of a fountain and gardens. The project was completed

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<sup>5</sup> Methods and tactics used in NDI's community organizing program and imparted to NDI local staff are summarized in a training manual included as an attachment.

<sup>6</sup> Photographs documenting the condition of sidewalks in Zvolen zapad prior to the Citizens Initiative's action as well as public hearings with the mayor are included as attachments.

in 1998.<sup>7</sup> As a second advocacy initiative, the Zvolen group constructed a strategic plan outlining specific activities that would pressure local officials to acknowledge and fix the problem of an unfinished school building. Due in part to the increased scrutiny resulting from the initiative, city officials decided to sell the building to a developer to be rehabilitated for apartments.

Initially, the Our Home *Sasova* group in the Sasova neighborhood of *Banska Bystrica* launched an initiative to reduce crime by proposing the introduction of several additional police patrols and the formalizing of a dialogue between residents and law enforcement officials through monthly crime watch meetings. The groups organizer, Olga Moravicova, circulated a petition that gathered more than 1,000 signatures in support of this drive. The *Banska Bystrica* Chief of Police verbally agreed to increase the number of patrols but did not follow through on his commitment. After an intense follow-on meeting, the police chief agreed to an increase in patrols and to demands for a verification system. Following the meeting, the organization produced hundreds of flyers and conducted an intensive media campaign to highlight the group's success.

The Sasova group later focused its efforts to rehabilitate an abandoned building that was supposed to house a polyclinic. The city of *Banska Bystrica*, which owned the land, had been unsuccessful in purchasing the building from the state. The unfinished building represented a threat to public safety, poor land-use planning, and the only hope for outpatient medical care in the district.

The Sasova group approached its campaign as a long-term initiative, with three distinct stages. The first stage was to concentrate on eliminating any threats to public health and safety. The group's leaders succeeded in convincing city officials to fence off and then clean up a section of the property still accessible to the public. The improvements made went toward helping a financially neglected residential area rather than planned office renovations for municipal offices, which posed a conflict of interest regarding the granting of city contracts by city officials. The group was praised by Vice Mayor Peter Lacny, citing that "the group in Sasova accomplished something that politicians from the area had not been able to do in over five years – to get the attention of the city on the polyclinic."<sup>8</sup>

### *Second-Year Organizations*

In the summer of 1997, NDI began to expand its community organizing program into several new areas of the country as well as *Banska Bystrica*. The new organizers participated in a two-week advocacy training program in the United States. A mentoring program was also established to facilitate the learning of complex political and organizational concepts that enabled organizers to explain elements of a successful organizing campaign within a Slovak

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<sup>7</sup> Photographs of the opening ceremony of the refurbished town square are included as attachments.

<sup>8</sup> A locally distributed leaflet publicizing an advocacy initiative coordinated by the "Our Home Sasova" community organizing group (including photographs of the abandoned polyclinic) is included as an attachment.

context. Common issues included the creation or refurbishing of public spaces, construction or repair of local roads, rehabilitation of water resources, and public safety improvements.

In *Nitra* two community groups were established, one in the neighborhood of *Klokocina* and the other in the *Chrenova* district. The group in *Klokocina* developed a campaign to address the problem of speeding in a school area. City officials later re-designated the area as a “housing zone,” with a reduced speed limit and speed bumps. Meanwhile, the community group in *Chrenova* built public support for the creation of a pedestrian recreation area. Their initiatives led city officials to create a “relax zone” and recognize the problem of speeding in city sections where students attend school.

The success of *Nitra* was contrasted by the difficulties of launching community organizing groups in *Zilina*. Based on an extensive assessment mission conducted in the summer of 1997, NDI decided that *Zilina* was of strategic importance to its expansion plans based on the size of the city and of the local support for project goals. Unfortunately over the next year and a half, NDI had difficulty finding organizers that were willing to commit to the program, and, as a consequence, many of the issue campaigns that had been planned never fully materialized.

In *Lucenec*, the community group initially developed a campaign to encourage the local hospital to modify its entrance to accommodate disabled people and younger children unable to climb the long flight of metal stairs leading to the only entrance of the building. The group circulated a petition signed by more than 350 residents of *Lucenec*. Unfortunately, the organizer in *Lucenec* decided to discontinue his work and the initiative was not continued. In August 1997, NDI hired a new organizer, *Drahamira Kucekova*, to revive the initiative. Under *Kucekova*’s leadership, the group in *Lucenec* created a plan for renovating recreational areas. The group continued to expand its efforts to recruit representatives throughout the city and has formed a city-wide board to oversee the direction of the emerging organization and strategies for expanding its work into other neighborhoods.

In the area surrounding the town of *Litava*, NDI began a group to organize eight rural communities. Many citizens expressed interest in building a children’s playground, and proposal was submitted to a national foundation. After being turned down by the foundation, the group organized an advocacy campaign targeted at the village council, which was approved. After an initial burst of enthusiasm, however, many of the campaigns became stagnant. In response, the *Litava* group prepared a year-long perspective plan to reinvigorate these campaigns and succeeded in a rural organizing initiative in the village of *Cerova* to remove several dangerous trees and have new ones replanted in their place.

The *NGO Coalition in Banska Bystrica* (BBzNO) was established as a regional body associated with the Gremium of the Third Sector, an established, nationwide network of NGOs. The group serves as a forum on and to coordinate joint projects. The group’s first initiative was to organize and host candidate forums preceding the December 1998 municipal elections.



Since NDI hired an organizer in late summer of 1998 to work in *Sidlisko* neighborhood of *Banska Bystrica*, much of the work completed was on identifying issues around which a campaign strategy and activities would be developed. Indications are that the group is interested in reducing crime and organizing a neighborhood beautification project in certain sections of the neighborhood. In addition, the *Sidlisko* group participated in organizing several candidate forums for parliamentary and local elections that took place in September and November 1998.

### *Training Missions*

Over the course of two years, NDI organized several training missions to the United States for the organizers in order to expose the participants to proven methods and practices of community organizing developed in the United States and to share experiences with community leaders and organizations outside of Slovakia. The first training mission took place in early September 1996. These missions were designed to introduce Slovak organizers to the principles and practices of organizing in the U.S. This first study mission entailed meeting with several neighborhood-based civic groups in the Cincinnati area followed by ten days of training in Chicago.

The training program was organized and implemented by the Citizen's Information Service (CIS), a community organization working on local and state issues. Introductory sessions discussed the role of an organizer and the concept of political power, followed by day-long sessions on interviewing and research; strategy development; planning; organization and coalition building; leadership; accountability; media; and lobbying. Presentations by CIS Executive Director Lauren Coletta and Jerry Morrison, a former NDI representative in Slovakia, were supplemented by role-playing exercises designed to activate trainee's knowledge and skills. The training concluded with a debriefing of participants in which they refined their plan of action for the coming months.

Subsequent groups of organizers hired by NDI received similar training in the United States prior to the initiation of their community organizing activities. Additionally, throughout the duration of the community organizing program, NDI recruited American experts to lead in-country training sessions on organizing techniques. These trainings were designed to introduce organizing methods and strategies to new organizers in the program and to teach more advanced skills to experienced organizers.

In early November 1996, Sister Barbara Busch, founder and director of the "Working in Neighborhoods" organization in Cincinnati, joined Chuck Hirt in providing a week of intensive training on leadership development and issue identification. Approximately 70 organizers and community leaders attended the training sessions. Training focused on matching issues and leaders to the physical structure and dynamics of the community in which the group was based.

During the periods of April 1997, April 1998, and June 1999, Lauren Coletta and Jim Field of CIS, and Todd Dieterle of the Woods Fund of Chicago conducted successive cycles of training on advocacy tactics concerning public relations and positioning vis-a-vis city governments and on revitalizing core community leadership. Trainings and consultations with first year organizers covered the basics of organizing work, while training sessions with more experienced organizers addressed advanced tactics and organizational building strategies. While providing comprehensive training inclusive of all organizers, NDI also tailored the training cycles to address the particular needs of each organization. In September 1998, NDI recruited Patricia Garry conduct two weeks of on-site visits with organizers, in an effort to revitalize the campaigns of first-year groups.

NDI also retained the services of fundraising expert, Chuck Daugherty, to help the community organizations in drafting and executing fundraising strategies. Daugherty has more than 15 years of experience in grassroots fundraising in the US and worked both with the Citizens Action Center and with community organizations on developing skills and strategies to obtain independent funding.

#### *Other Activities*

Throughout the program, NDI hosted biannual “Gathering of Leaders” conferences, intended to coordinate activities, evaluate past performances, develop strategies and share experiences among the program’s organizers and community leaders. These meetings served to coordinate the implementation of advocacy campaigns throughout Slovakia, to foster future collaborative efforts, and to act as a catalyst for discussions on the development of a national community organizing campaign.

A critical first step in the formation of a nationwide network of politically active community associations in Slovakia began in December 1996, when NDI convened a meeting including organizations under NDI’s USAID funded program as well as those organizations in Trencin and Presov, where NDI conducted similar programs under a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy. While NDI provided oversight to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of these discussions, the Institute organized these conferences in a way in which Slovak civic leaders assumed responsibility and leadership of this undertaking. Work on the coordination of a national campaign continues.

On an informal basis, NDI representative Charles Hirt also advised Slovak civic groups and NGOs on strategy and organizational development. In May 1997, Mr. Hirt provided technical advice to Banska Bystrica’s NGOs in crafting an action plan for a public rally to protest legislation severely restricting the independence of foundations in Slovakia. That advice included suggestions on arranging speakers, coordinating statements, and securing vital support from political leaders in local government.

The subsequent rally that ensued was well-attended by the city’s citizenry and was widely covered in the local media, indicating that Slovak NGOs, when organized, could exert

influence and build public support for democratic initiatives. After the rally, Mr. Hirt assisted participants in their efforts to organize viable associations of NGOs. NDI also advised Juraj Mesik and other leaders of the Slovak NGO community on the organization of the Gremium of the Third Sector and its plans to convene a national NGO conference.

#### **IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The objectives of the second phase of the program, which was completed in June 1998, were that 1) the second-year organizers and their respective community groups become increasingly organizationally and programmatically, if not financially, independent; that 2) the first-year organizers become skilled in developing and implementing public advocacy initiatives and have cultivated community leaders and associations to spearhead those initiatives; and that 3) a comprehensive strategy for sustainability and expansion of community organizing in Slovakia be produced for implementation in the program's third phase. In all three instances, NDI has met its objectives.

The second-year community organizers progressed in their roles as mature organizers of their respective groups in Sasova and Zvolen. They and the community leaders with whom they work are increasingly operating independently of NDI supervision and becoming integrated into the local decision-making process. Elected officials consult with their organizations on important issues, an illustration of their ability to establish themselves as legitimate community representatives.

First year organizers have successfully completed initiatives in both advocacy and issue-based projects. The issues chosen by the Sasova community have multi-phased objectives and are more politically complicated than the groups' first issues, reflecting the organizations' increased sophistication and confidence.

Mentoring between first and second year organizers continues successfully. The mentoring program allows the newer organizers to consult with a fellow Slovak who has gone through the same experience and understands the elements of a successful advocacy campaign.

A strategy for sustainability has already been elaborated in the workplan from July 1998 to July 1999. In it, NDI proposes establishing of a public advocacy center to serve as a coordinating body on matters of fundraising, planning, and training and assisting the individual community civic groups obtain organizational and financial independence. With regard to the latter, NDI plans to initiate a series of training workshops on strategic planning, creating mission statements, drafting workplans, establishing boards, and hiring staff. Although the groups will rely on access to partial funding from the aforementioned advocacy center, they are also supposed to take steps to complete their financing goals through independent fundraising. NDI has secured the part-time services of American fundraising consultant Charles Daugherty to work with the community organizations on creating and implementing grassroots fundraising plans.

## V. EVALUATION

The program's original objectives stated in September 1995 were to produce 1) a core group of Slovak community organizers to implement grassroots issue campaigns that engage citizens in helping to define and resolve neighborhood issues; 2) to train this group in how to train others in community organizing; 3) to assist in creating a community organizing network in Slovakia; and 4) to encourage local officials to communicate directly with citizenry and to foster public participation in municipal government. To large extent these objectives have remained at the program's core throughout the last two years, and NDI has, for the most part, fulfilled them. At the same time, the objectives evolved considerably over time to conform with Slovakia's political and social context.

After initially proposing to recruiting and train groups of five people in three or four cities within a one-year, NDI realized that it would have to scale back then number organizers it developed and extend the time required to have them fully trained. Moreover, the issue of sustainability became prominent. In addition to providing organizers with the skills necessary for effective citizen representation, teaching organizational skills, such as strategic planning and fundraising was necessary in order to create truly independent community groups. Similarly, it became clear that not all of the community groups would achieve independence by the program's completion because of their disparate levels of development. NDI therefore added the objective of creating an umbrella organization that would provide coordinated planning and resource sharing after the Institute completed its program.

These adjustments came about for a number of reasons. First, the historical absence of citizen involvement required considerable preliminary education in the concept of participatory democracy in order to prepare the trainees for the political and organizational challenges that laid ahead of them. Second, the development of skilled community organizers working with viable community-based associations under the best conditions commonly takes several years to accomplish. This is primarily because the transfer of requisite political and organizational skills requires direct experience in forming sustainable community-based organizations and in implementing issue-based campaigns. Third, at the time, Slovakia's political climate was such that people were generally fearful of participating in activities that might have been interpreted as challenging the Meciar government. Finally, the willingness of Slovaks to embrace the principles of community organizing, which often requires confrontation, was not automatic in a society that places a premium on consensus.

The program was on balance a success. It is also clear that the program has contributed to the democratization process at the local level through increased citizen participation, including several community leaders gaining public office and formal agreement between the municipal government of Banska Bystrica and the city's NGO coalition. The program also played its part in bringing about a sea-change in Slovakia's political system with the defeat of the Meciar government and HzDS in the 1998 parliamentary and local elections.

**The program has also contributed significantly to leadership development throughout the country and a sense of empowerment among Slovakia's citizens. Each community organizing group has nurtured a minimum of 8-10 neighborhood leaders. In addition, those citizens connected with the program's activities have experienced improvements in their living conditions and a sense of ownership in the political process and their accomplishments.**

**The program primary deficiency was the high turnover of organizers, particularly in the case of Zilina. To remedy this situation, NDI decided to expand its organizer positions from part-time to full-time. This has helped to improve matters, but more effort is needed to find people with a greater commitment to organizing.**