Improving Municipal Governance and Service Delivery Through Transparency in Kotor, Montenegro

CSO:	Centre for Democratic Transition (CDT)
Years:	2011 - 2012
Country:	Kotor, Montenegro
Amount:	$ 27,490 USD
Sector:	Governance: Improving Governance at Local, Municipal, State and National Levels: Budgeting

Corruption Problem:	Lack of local government capacity to implement an inclusive municipal anti-corruption strategy
Tools employed:	Survey, Constructive Engagement, Coalition Building, Capacity Building, Complaints Handling, RTI, M&E, Citizen Monitoring, Participatory Planning

Improving governance at the local level through increased transparency, voice and better service delivery was the objective of a joint project between the Centre for Democratic Transition (CDT), a national NGO based in Podgorica, Montenegro, and the Kotor municipality, Montenegro.

To strengthen the existent municipal anti-corruption strategy (MACS) – both in terms of capacity building, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and concrete anti-corruption guidelines to be established and followed – CDT relied on international best practice as well as local knowledge. The NGO learned about successful models and utilized technical advice from the municipality of Rijeka, Croatia, and adapted these to be addressing the needs of stakeholders committed to improve local governance in Kotor.

Corruption Problem Addressed

Municipal service delivery in Montenegro is held back by a severe lack of transparency and corruption on the local level, according to a study published by the Montenegro Directorate for Anti Corruption Initiative and UNDP Montenegro.*

In recognition of this assessment, the Government of Montenegro has adopted policies supporting enhanced transparency at the local level. Within the established framework, every Montenegrin municipality is tasked to develop its own municipal anti-corruption strategy and action plan.

The Municipality of Kotor, a UNESCO protected site and tourist destination, took the lead and formed a working group, consisting of representatives of the local administration, NGOs and the media. Through a series of surveys, the working group confirmed that the public was highly concerned about corruption, especially with regard to municipal service delivery and the transparency provisions in place. Besides a lack of regulation, the surveys also confirmed a lack of capacity pertaining to both, stakeholders within the government as well as non-governmental stakeholders, e.g. NGOs as well as the public at large.

Kotor drafted its first MACS, which focused on capacity building measures, increased transparency and procedures. A monitoring and evaluation mechanism was also included. The municipality however had little experience and lacked the capacity to implement the agreed upon strategy and therefore turned to CDT for assistance.

Actions Taken by CDT

Based on the surveys conducted, CDT and the Kotor Municipal Government designed a project to improve service delivery and transparency. The project's activities were aimed at:

✓ Assisting the municipality to develop, upgrade, implement and monitor its broader municipal anti-corruption strategy.
✓ Establishing a direct link to and exchange platform harnessing the experiences of municipality of Rijeka, Croatia, and turning these experiences into technical advice.
✓ Providing citizens with timely information via the web on the activities and decisions taken by the municipal assembly and its administrative bodies as well as on budgets and program outcomes.
✓ Publishing 'easy-to-understand budget reports' which provide a simple overview of financial operations, including public procurement contracts and asset declarations of municipal officials.
✓ Establishing mechanisms for the submission of citizens' inquiries and complaints including the appointment of an official to receive and respond to citizen's inquiries.
✓ Training staff to gain awareness of and dealing with transparency challenges, notably handling corruption reports filed by citizens.
✓ Providing IT skills training necessary to maintain user-friendly web transparency.

Lessons learned

While implementing the project, the stakeholders realized that voice does not automatically lead to accountability. CDT and the Kotor municipality have thus agreed to supplement existing civic oversight with M&E mechanisms that will serve as the basis for an assessment of further impact and the quality of implementation of newly adopted measures in the long-run.

Impact and Results Achieved

The project improved the public's access to information measurably, enhanced government officials' capacity to guarantee transparency as agreed upon in the ACM and in its various procedures. CDT and the municipality have successfully opened spaces for citizens to ask questions, register complaints and discuss the budgeting process, providing the public with easy to understand, timely and relevant information on municipal activities.

✓ Mechanisms for submission of citizens' inquiries and complaints are in place and are increasingly used by individuals and the NGOs involved. The government has budgeted resources and appointed personnel to receive and respond to citizen's inquiries.

✓ The Kotor municipality has become the first among 21 Montenegrin municipalities to enhance local governance substantially, enhancing both the provisions and capacities of the demand as well as the supply side.

✓ The municipality of Kotor is committed to continue the program. The long term impact is expected to be significant as the program is also replicated and extended to other progressive municipalities.

The CDT/Kotor municipality program serves as a case in point on how political and/or bureaucratic resistance can be overcome in local governance settings. Targeting "enlightened" municipalities, NGOs can engage in constructive cooperation and win the confidence of municipal politicians and administrations and thereby help transfer knowledge and best practices which will lead to

more transparency and improve the municipalities' ability to deliver results.

At best, municipal politicians and administrators will realize that transparency and responsiveness to citizens will not harm their interests. Instead of providing "ammunition" for public criticism, the project may increase the confidence of citizens and the legitimacy of both politicians and administrators. As a minimum, municipalities will highlight and point to less transparent procedures in nearby communities and contribute raising awareness toward the benefit of improved governance across the board.

As a follow-up to the results achieved, PTF is now working with CDT to develop a regional project based on the Kotor model, engaging a number of municipalities in the Balkan region to work in parallel, enabling further peer-to-peer exchange. To finance the project, PTF seeks funding from the European Union.

Documentation

Project completion reports (PCRs) and Project completion assessments (PCAs) can be accessed at www.ptfund.org under the "Where-we-work" tab

The 'Directorate for Anti-Corruption Initiative'/UNDP study 'Capacity and Integrity assessment of Local Self Governance sector in Montenegro' can be accessed at: http://www.undp.org.me/files/reports/index.html#ijr

The CDT website, detailing the project and various bulletins can be accessed at http://www.cdtmn.org

Kotor's website can be accessed at http://www.opstinakotor.com/

For further information, please contact milana@cdtmn.org

PTF can be contacted at info@ptfund.org

Prepared by: Milana Čabarkapa, CDT; Lars Jeurling, PTF, Johannes Tonn, PTF