Fostering Responsive and Collaborative Citizen Solutions in Ukraine
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What is the general context in which the story takes place?

Two years after the EuroMaidan Revolution, Ukraine continues on an uneven path toward democracy. Bloated bureaucracies, entrenched corruption and a culture of political disengagement among citizens create profound challenges to fundamentally reform and rebuild a pluralistic political party system in which parties and the Ukrainian government are more transparent and responsive to citizens. These challenges are especially acute at the regional and local level. IRI has been working to build a more consultative, cooperative political process particularly at these levels by promoting linkages between civil society organizations (CSOs)/citizen groups and political parties/elected officials. These political and civic leaders are increasingly aware of the benefits of cooperation, but lack understanding of how to effectively collaborate on issues of citizen concern. IRI’s theory of change posits that by working together, political leaders and civic activists could be more effective in responding to citizen priorities and promoting democratic change within Ukraine. Both sectors appear receptive to enhancing their capacity to develop more transparent and participatory decision-making processes and to address issues of concern to their local communities. However, IRI’s experience also demonstrates that this cooperation is more sustainable and impactful if these issues of concern are identified through a consultative process involving political and civic leaders as well as ordinary citizens. IRI’s approach therefore incorporated a CLA process comprised of regular beneficiary feedback at regular intervals during implementation, as well as a deliberate adaptation process in response to this feedback.
What was the main challenge or opportunity you were addressing with this CLA approach or activity?

To implement this program, IRI first identifies targeted communities and stakeholder groups comprised of representatives from the civic and political sectors – CSO leaders, citizen activities, party representatives and/or elected officials. Depending on community needs, IRI either conducts a roundtable, teaching best practices and benefits of collaboration to address citizen interests, and then asks stakeholder groups to identify specific issues to serve as the focal point of that collaboration, or, having already selected the issue through consultations, conducts an event for stakeholder groups on that specific issue. Early on (2013-2014), stakeholder groups in different communities identified a variety of topics including local budgeting processes, anti-corruption campaigns, city charters, municipal plans for economic development, efficient waste management, and energy consumption. However, during program follow-up, IRI learned that usually no more than half of the stakeholder groups reported ongoing collaboration in the weeks and months following the initial event. IRI learned that this was largely because the groups often struggled to agree on issues, and when they did, they were often issues of interest to only a limited number of activists in each city.

Because the CLA component was integrated into the program approach, IRI was well-positioned to respond to a particular opportunity to more effectively facilitate sustainable, citizen-focused collaboration within stakeholder groups. This opportunity was the 2015 introduction of a new national law on the management of housing associations. According to the new Law on Peculiarities of Ownership in Multi-Apartment Buildings, all apartment owners in multi-apartment buildings must decide by January 1, 2017 on the administration of their buildings. The law created space for highly localized self-governance and a specific mechanism for political and civic activists to address citizen concerns: whereas many multi-residential buildings were previously managed by government-contracted management companies (which often resulted in corruption and inefficiency) apartment owners in multi-apartment buildings will now be empowered to decide for themselves who would administer their buildings, including via citizen-led associations. As a result of IRI’s established relationships and dedicated CLA process with local political party branches, civil society organizations and government officials throughout Ukraine, IRI quickly recognized the importance of this issue and adapted our programming accordingly.

Through the CLA process, IRI determined that a lack of information and miscommunication was leading to misunderstanding about the law and the opportunity for further corruption in the procurement of management contracts. IRI determined that it could support local political party branches and civil society organizations in filling this information gap and provide citizens with clear, accurate and helpful explanations of the law and practical assistance in establishing independent housing associations, which can assume private building management. Ultimately, cooperation on this issue has led political and civic activists to go onto form their own housing associations, now allowed in the new law, to manage residential property. While IRI is in the process of evaluating this project, early evidence suggests that the housing associations have provided a powerful and sustainable example of collaboration between civic and political sectors to address community interests.

Describe the CLA approach or activity, explaining how the activity integrated collaborating, learning, adapting culture, processes, and/or resources as applicable.

In order to support more representative and accountable political processes and actors through enhanced civic engagement and advocacy at the sub-national level in Ukraine, IRI’s CLA process was integrated into a program objective to develop trust and build working relationships between CSOs and political parties. This aimed at increasing the level of cooperation and linkages among political parties and civil society on local electoral and political process issues.
IRI’s CLA process focused on a multi-step approach to making operational the three principles of Collaborating, Learning and Adapting. First, IRI’s activity focused on facilitating cooperation between political parties and CSOs through participant-driven issue agendas. Second, IRI built in a beneficiary feedback mechanism as part of its project monitoring process to support data-driven learning, which as noted earlier highlighted inconsistent issue identification among stakeholders as a factor inhibiting cooperation. Finally, IRI’s allowed for adaptation in consultation with beneficiaries to leverage emergent opportunities – specifically, to shift focus to the management of housing associations following the introduction of legislation.

**Facilitating Collaboration:** IRI has worked with more than 900 local CSO and political party stakeholders in eight oblasts (or provinces) across Ukraine, including in conflict-affected Donetsk, through a collaborative activity that integrated learning from the stakeholders themselves. This collaboration had three main steps. First, IRI identified the set of stakeholders in each oblast that IRI had existing relationships with. In many cases, IRI responded to requests from actors in each oblast with whom IRI had maintained long-term relationships. Alternatively, IRI conducted assessments with stakeholders to help identify the issue. Second, IRI convened these actors and conducted collaboratively focused seminars and roundtables between civil society organizations and political parties on any topic the group selected to discuss. IRI responded to requests from these stakeholders to conduct joint training seminars and help facilitate joint roundtable dialogues on topics including amalgamation, local budgeting processes, multi-apartment housing associations, anti-corruption campaigns, city charters, municipal plans for economic development, efficient waste management, and energy consumption.

**Beneficiary Feedback Mechanism:** Following these roundtables, IRI’s monitoring and evaluation processes identified the issue selection to be critical in fostering the type of collaborative relationships IRI was seeking to support. Through a series of in-depth interviews conducted with a sample of beneficiaries, IRI’s Ukraine team collated and analyzed stakeholder interview feedback based on earlier roundtables. Following this analysis, the Ukraine team, in consultations with stakeholder groups, determined that the selection of the issue would have to garner significant public interest, be perceived by both the political and civic sectors as actionable, and be accessible for each sector to identify their own interest in engaging on the issue.

**Program Adaptation:** The introduction of a new law that allowed for changes in the management of housing associations, an issue of critical public interest, provided an opportunity to redirect some of IRI’s activities. Concurrently, IRI received requests from stakeholders to provide technical assistance and support on the issue of management of housing associations. Citizens often lacked access to the correct information to make informed decisions since the law provided several options with differing implications on their housing management. In response to this opportunity, which matched the selection criteria mentioned above, IRI conducted an additional series of roundtables that brought together stakeholder groups and expert trainers to provide attendees with information on housing associations to make informed decisions about the future structure they preferred. This allowed some stakeholder groups to go onto form their own housing associations, now allowed in the new law, to manage residential property.

**Were there any special considerations during implementation (e.g., necessary resources, implementation challenges or obstacles, and enabling factors)?**

Two key factors enabled the CLA process to be successful. First, IRI’s long-term relationships with CSO and political party stakeholders provided for a free exchange of views related to the needs of local communities. It also allowed IRI to play a convening role to bring together these stakeholders. This even occurred in more challenging political contexts, a testament to IRI’s ability to leverage
relationships in difficult operating climates. Second, IRI’s built-in flexibility allowed for the incorporation of feedback. This feedback allowed for IRI to adjust its CLA activity to ensure it was maximally effective at delivering real, jointly agreed initiatives upon which the CSOs and parties could focus their efforts.

IRI faced an initial challenge in the program approach, which the CLA process enabled IRI to course correct during implementation. At the beginning, IRI had maintained flexibility on the focus of the CLA activity and topics included reforms on tariffs and land as well as the establishment of housing associations. However, following consultation with stakeholders during the feedback stage of the CLA process, IRI realized that the area of issue identification needed to be timely and focus on areas of broader public interest. The introduction of the new law provided an opportunity which IRI’s CLA activity was able to take advantage of by redirecting the issue under consideration by CSOs and political party members for some of the programming. Simultaneously, IRI responded to requests from these stakeholders to provide additional technical assistance on the management of housing associations.

The CLA process required mostly specialized skills to convene, facilitate and monitor the impact of the CLA activity. As the activities were already budgeted as part of either program implementation or monitoring processes, the CLA portion of the activity was modest in terms of financial resources.

**With your initial challenge/opportunity in mind, what have been the most significant outcomes, results, or impacts of the activity or approach to date?**

IRI has been able to successfully track and measure the CLA process along with the overall program. For example, since January 2016, IRI has conducted more than 26 seminars with more than 1,400 participants specifically on the management of housing associations. This past quarter, IRI conducted 17 seminars with more than 700 participants specifically on this issue. Whereas in the early years of the program, follow up with participants suggested that no more than half of the stakeholder groups reported ongoing collaboration following the IRI activity, follow-up from these more recent events (which include the focus on housing associations) are leading to much higher levels of ongoing engagement. Of the 17 stakeholder groups from last quarter, IRI has conducted follow-up on 13 and determined that 10 continue their engagement. Notably, these 10 includes stakeholder groups who are working toward establishing their own housing associations. Three stakeholder groups have advanced their efforts to the next level and are working on the creation of an umbrella association of housing associations. A local civil society organization in Rivne oblast continues to work on housing associations by organizing additional meetings with citizens and by providing clear information to citizens on local television. In addition, in another community in Rivne, citizens have worked with a political party to create an interactive map that shows the housing associations created within their city, as well as other neighborhoods that have begun the process. After a roundtable in Donetsk oblast on housing associations, the mayor, together with heads of housing associations, visited an oblast in Western Ukraine at their own expense to learn best practices from their counterparts and create associations in their own oblast.

**If your project or activity is in the development phase or just recently underway (less than 1 year into implementation), how do you intend to track results and impact? What outcomes do you anticipate?**

This CLA approach has been in place since the project began in 2013; however, the new focus on housing associations began in January 2016. As mentioned above, IRI has made critical progress on meeting its planned results and has seen a discernable impact on addressing one of the key issues faced by local communities in Ukraine, namely, the management of housing associations. IRI’s Kyiv-based
monitoring and evaluation specialist, Natalya Yakymchuk, is conducting an internal evaluation of the project as part of her participation in IRI’s Mentored Evaluation initiative, an IRI training program to build local capacity for M&E. She will assess program results specifically focused on identifying successful examples of cooperation between political parties and civic society organizations that resulted in a successful improvement for local communities. The evaluation will establish the level of cooperation between political parties and CSOs and how cooperation has changed over the program, as well as how and if these stakeholders developed trust and built sustainable working relationships through IRI’s activities. This evaluation will take place in seven locations based on where IRI conducted activities and will use a combination of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with stakeholders. One area the evaluation will also explore is where stakeholders have worked on the establishment of housing associations and continue to advocate for the creation of housing associations including the creation of a joint national association of housing associations to protect their interests. This evaluation will inform additional programming that is anticipated to take place in 2017.

What were the most important lessons learned?

There are two main lessons learned. First, the in-built flexibility of the program both supported and benefited from the CLA process. The program did not specify the exact focal point of the activity but allowed stakeholders involved in the process to guide the topic that IRI would later provide technical assistance. Second, the CLA process highlighted the importance of relationships. IRI has conducted programming in Ukraine for 20 years and as built solid, trust-centered relationships with stakeholders. This allowed IRI to act as a convener for bringing both political parties and civil society together to focus on an issue of common cause. In addition, it allowed IRI to be receptive to the needs and concerns of stakeholders it was involved with and ensured that the program responded and focused on the issues affecting ordinary citizens. IRI plans on using its CLA experience by developing an issue identification tool for use by participants and beneficiaries when making initial decisions about issue identification for activities designed to foster collaboration between different sectors.

Any other critical information you’d like to share?

In addition, it is significant to note that through IRI’s CLA activity, local political party branches and local civil society organizations are being encouraged to work together to address an issue – the issue of housing associations – that is of specific interest and concern to women. Women play leading roles in housing associations and are most active in their establishment and frequently hold key positions. For example, one a female trainer for IRI, who was a primary school teacher, became a leading expert on the maintenance of housing stock. IRI has observed this trend in all regions of Ukraine, where women are the initiators of creating condominiums and are the heads of these associations. While political parties and CSOs did not specifically target women to participate in joint seminars on the issue of housing associations, the majority of those attending the public workshops were women. For example, between April and June 2016, IRI conducted 17 seminars with CSO and party members on the issue of housing associations for 702 participants, 415 of whom were women (59%).