2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

CLA for Behavior Change in Public Participation in Kosovo

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Organization:

Democracy International/Dev. Partners. Int'l

Summary:

In 2021, the USAID/Kosovo Social Contract Activity embarked on a five-year project to explore sustainable practices for public participation to improve Kosovo citizens' quality of life and strengthen their partnership with their municipal government. During the first year and a half of the project, the Activity partnered with five municipalities, conducted multifaceted assessments to identify specific barriers and facilitators to public participation in each municipality, and worked with municipal officials and citizens to create municipal-specific action plans called "Social Contract Agendas". The Activity will continue to work with the municipalities and their citizens in the coming months to successfully implement the mutual goals within their respective Social Contract Agenda. Throughout this process the development challenge/opportunity is to create sustainable behavioral change with the partner municipalities. To help achieve this challenge/opportunity, the Activity used CLA tools including pause and reflect sessions and adaptive management to allow for real time learning and improvements to the Social Contract Activity process. In particular, the team would use pause and reflect sessions and after-action reviews following each activity with the municipalities and their citizens to identify programmatic pivots or additions. These changes have resulted in increased buy-in from both parties and the Activity has seen evidence of preliminary behavioral change, including the replication of the Social Contract Agenda process in participatory budgeting by all municipalities (allowing direct citizen input in local decision making), municipalities working with citizens to resolve community issues, and increased citizen participation in innovative ways of budget planning.

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

The Social Contract Activity is a five-year program that seeks to address a lack of citizen participation at the municipal level and inconsistencies in municipal governments proactively seeking citizen input in local decision-making processes. With the hindsight of past program failures of improving public participation in Kosovo, the Activity is designed to take a fundamentally different approach, namely to facilitate a process where municipalities and its citizens jointly design public participation practices that they perceive as valuable, effective, and feasible, and to support them to actualize their proposed changes. The Activity is comprised of a Program Team and a Learning Team that work together to ensure that all programmatic activities are evidence-based, and that continuous learning and adaptation are prioritized. In the first 18 months of the Activity, the team 1) completed an assessment of public participation practices in five partner municipalities using social and behavioral science to identify specific barriers and facilitators to public participation in each municipality and 2) brought together a cross section of community representatives and municipal officials to design five municipal-specific action plans or "Social Contract Agendas". These Agendas include public practices to improve and two community issues to resolve by joint actions. The development challenge/opportunity that the Activity faced was to create behavioral change with municipal officials and citizens alike to increase citizen participation in municipal decision making. The team used social science underpinnings, iterative pause and reflect sessions, and adaptive management exercises to maximize the program's effectiveness in engaging municipal officials and citizens in the Social Contract Activity process.

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

Adaptive Management

Pause & Reflect

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

The Social Contract Activity team exercised proactive and responsive adaptive management to improve its activities and products. In particular, the team met regularly to recalibrate upcoming activities based on changes to the context or the presentation of new information. Additionally, the team conducted mock sessions ahead of activities, observation during activities, and pause and reflect sessions and after-action reviews after activities to maximize learning and subsequent adaptation. The team began running mock sessions prior to any workshop taking place to determine whether adaptations could be made based on Learning Team observations and feedback. This process ensured more effective team preparation and less troubleshooting when conducting sessions with beneficiaries. Secondly, during the actual workshops, the Learning Team observed the interactions between participants and facilitated post-workshop pause and reflect sessions, while the Program Team integrated agreed upon changes. An example of adaptive management occurred during the first Social Contract Agenda workshop where municipal officials and representatives of community groups proposed, prioritized, and selected through a voting process two community issues to resolve together in 18 months. During the workshop, the team observed that some participants felt compelled to align their voting with the votes of the municipal officials, which resulted in the selection of community issues that were more of a priority for municipal officials rather than citizen representatives. The team conducted an after-action review following the workshop and decided to change the process so that only citizens would be allowed to vote on the community issues. Municipal officials were still involved in planning the steps to resolve the community issues and make improvement to the chosen public participation practices. This adaptation empowered community groups to actively partake in the decision making, while the municipal officials worked hand in hand with them to ensure the resolution of the issues. During subsequent pause and reflect exercises, community groups lauded this adaptation as valuable, fair, and suggested continuing this practice in the future. This further solidified trust and good relations between both parties.

Similarly, during the first three Social Contract Agenda workshops, through a series of pause and reflect sessions, the team learned that beneficiaries tend to be overly ambitious in selecting which priority practices and community issues to address. The team therefore made necessary adaptations to ensure the outputs are reasonable and achievable within the planned time frame.

The team also designed an Activity-wide pause and reflect exercise at the end of Year 1 to consider adaptations to employ during Year 2 of the Activity. In total, the Learning Team conducted 16 key informant interviews with members from the Program Team, USAID/Kosovo, local partners, municipal officials, and community group representatives from two pilot municipalities to gather insights from Year 1. The Learning Team then led a session with the entire Social Contract Activity team (including a local subcontractor) to discuss the findings and build consensus on adaptations for Year 2. One agreed upon adaptation was to integrate a local partner into both the governance and community engagement sides of the Activity's process instead of only the community engagement component. This pivot followed recognition of local partners' capacity and the goal of increasing local ownership. Secondly, the Learning Team decided that it should explore additional CLA approaches such as outcome harvesting to capture results that might not be realized in the existing log frame. In these instances, the team proactively applied learning and reflection exercises to improve the planning and implementation of interventions for Year 2.

4. RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

A. DEVELOPM ENT RESULTS

Changing behavior is not an easy task and it takes time to yield sustainable results. However, after a comprehensive set of interventions and their adaptations, early evidence suggests changes in the behavior of municipal official and community groups have occurred. The team witnessed a notable change in the behavior of mayors and municipal officials when they expressed their desire to implement participatory budgeting, a process introduced by the Social Contract Activity, as part of the municipal budget planning process (which falls outside of the Activity's scope), allowing direct citizen input on local decision making. For the first time in Kosovo, these partner municipalities made significant financial commitments and organized the participatory budgeting prioritization and voting sessions themselves, with minimal support from the Activity. During the prioritization sessions, citizens proposed projects for their localities, while the municipalities ensured that the proposals are in line with municipal abilities. One week after the prioritization sessions concluded, citizens gathered to cast ballots for their favorite project. During previous non-participatory budget hearings, citizen participation was rather low. However, through the implementation of participatory budgeting, the Activity witnessed a two-threefold increase in citizen participation. As a result, citizens felt empowered to act as agents of change for their communities' advancement. Another example of behavioral change occurred after the Social Contract Agenda workshops, when some of the participating mayors called meetings with the civil society representatives and citizens that participated in the workshops independently from the Social Contract Activity, to continue the conversation on the community issues included in the Agenda, thus continuing the process without receiving any support from the team. Ultimately, mayors and municipal officials are realizing that working together with citizens to resolve community issues generates greater commitment of citizens to participate in the solutions and increases their trust in the work of the municipality.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

The Social Contract Activity team by design has a dedicated Learning Team with four members (MEL Specialist, CLA Specialist, Project Assistant, and Learning Lead). The model of a separate Learning Team has proved to be a significant strength of the Activity, supporting continuous learning processes, and maximizing the potential of adaptive management. Having a dedicated learning team should be the new standard in project development. Nevertheless, one of the challenges the Social Contract Activity team faced was not having sufficient team members to cover all the required roles given that assessment activities took place within a brief time span (every two days), while the locations of these activities were spread out across the country in all five pilot municipalities. To mitigate the lack of staff members, team members assumed different roles to support the implementation of activities. For instance, the Program Team served as small group facilitators while the learning team members served as note takers and coordinators. During the second half of the project, when the Activity will partner with 10 additional municipalities and replicate the assessment and Social Contract Agenda processes, one of the adaptations that the team will apply is ensuring that there is ample time for the assessment. During this second iteration, the Learning Team will solely lead the assessment activities while the Program Team will continue the implementation of programmatic activities. This way, the Learning Team will have more time and space to synthesize assessment findings and to advise the Program Team on strong, evidence-based interventions.