



RGD – Making a Difference

Project Teams bring the Zakarpattya Regional Strategy to Life through Project Management Training (PMT)

13 priority tasks from the Zakarpattya Regional Strategy have been realized in the last year with the help of the RGD Project, with over twice that number of young civil servants and NGO leaders learning the essential skills of project design, project management and multi-professional teamwork. Provided below are background to this initiative as well as a note on its importance for the future development of the Zakarpattya region.

A Strategy on Paper

Like other regions in Ukraine, Zakarpattya oblast was eager to learn the methodology of strategic planning



PMT training in Zakarpattya, 2009

from the successful experience of Western European and North American cities. In contrast with many regions co-operating with donor programs, Zakarpattya was also very quick to understand the importance of carrying out the planning process in an inclusive way, with wide participation from local governments, business, community organizations and the scientific community. No doubt this was much helped by the region's post-communist history of an active NGO sector, and RGD Canadian experts had no trouble convincing their local partners in the Oblast Administration of the value of this approach. Nevertheless, while the strategy was enthusiastically adopted by the Regional Council in December 2006 and had always intended to be much more than theoretical exercise, its implementation was rather ad hoc and unsystematic. As so often happens (and not only in

Ukraine!), there was much uncertainty in terms of organizing and financing the strategy implementation.

Agreeing on Priorities

With guidance and support from RGD's Canadian and Ukrainian experts, in the summer of 2008 the Oblast Administration began the process of identifying tasks within the strategy's 5 priority directions that were considered sufficiently concrete and practical to be realizable within the short to medium term. Once again, this process involved input from a wide representation of community interests, including the working groups who had been responsible for the design of the strategy

itself. The Oblast Administration also asked district and municipal authorities to consult with local organizations and businesses and to express their view on which of the strategy's nearly 100 operational



PMT training participants, 2009

tasks should take top priority. The recommendations of working groups and local governments were narrowed down to a more manageable 26.

Context

In October 2008, at the request of the leadership of the Oblast Administration, RGD began a 9-month program of training and mentoring for a group of mainly young specialists from regional and local government. The training group also included a small number of representatives from the region's NGO community. Almost without exception, trainees had no previous experience of strategic project design and management. Of the 26 tasks put forward by the regional leadership, 15 were finally identified as having potential for significant progress within the 9-month span of the program and a project team leader was assigned to each of these from the training group. The team leader's job was to design their project from zero in consultation with key stakeholders in their town or district and to begin the process of implementation, including locating sources of financial support. Given Zakarpattya's relatively low level of economic development and limited budget capacity, one of the goals set for team leaders was to attract funds from outside the region.

Innovative and Developmental Projects

Civil servants in Ukraine, as everywhere, spend much of their time on routine bureaucratic tasks. However, the projects which quickly emerged from the training group were far from the mundane, everyday work that participants were accustomed to. To give three examples: the ecology section of the training group included the regeneration of a neglected and heavily polluted canal-side area in the centre of Beregovo, a historic town bordering Hungary; the social development component included a proposal for a hospice for the terminally ill, a provision which is still very new in Ukraine and a real innovation for Zakarpattia; lastly, one of a number of promising economic development projects was the formation of a co-operative of small fruit and vegetable farmers, most of them women, with a view to strengthening their bargaining power with wholesale markets.

New Knowledge and Skills

All project leaders were introduced to the basic skills and instruments of results-based project design and management, partly through regular training workshops

but also through individual consultation and coaching from RGD's Ukrainian experts in the region. Particularly involved were Svitlana Slava who has worked with the project from the early days of regional strategy preparation, and Yaroslav Bojko who joined Svitlana as an assistant trainer. Sessions were also organized on sources accessing funding – because of its unique geographical position Zakarpattia is ideally placed to take advantage of the EU's new cross-border programs – and how to preparing successful proposals. Wherever possible, RGD was able to put project leaders in touch with similar but more developed projects elsewhere in Ukraine, or to assist projects to organize events to publicize their activities to potential users or sponsors. One of the most innovative of the projects, a tourist information centre for children and adults with disabilities, won a prize for its publicity material (prepared with help from RGD) at an international fair and tourism exhibition held in the Zakarpattia region. The centre has since been awarded grant financing for 2010 from both the Oblast Administration and the district council in the city of Uzhgorod.

Key Impacts

Of the 15 projects that started out in the autumn of 2008, 13 completed the very demanding training and capacity building program which had its concluding module in June this year. All 13 project leaders were able to demonstrate progress not only with project conception and design, but more importantly with practical implementation. For example, a proposed day centre for adults with disabilities in Irshavski district had secured the use of a building from a village council, and an industrial park project in Beregovo had located a Hungarian partner with whom to make an application for joint financing from one of the EU cross-border programs, and had received planning approval for its proposal from the District Council. Almost 1 million Euros in project funding have so far been applied for from EU and other sources with advice from RGD experts, and while these requests are still under consideration, there are promising signs that at least some will meet with success. The hospice project was recently awarded funds by Ukrainian and Dutch sources to establish a limited 4-bed facility for the terminally ill in the local district hospital, as a first step towards its longer-term goal. Perhaps the most important outcome, however, is the development of a core group of skilled and committed specialists in local and regional government, who are able to design projects to the standards required by international donors and investors and to see them through to the realization stage. These transferable skills are the key to the long-term impact and sustainability of the practical approach to regional strategy implementation pioneered by RGD and its Zakarpattia partners.

Project Information

The Regional Governance and Development (RGD) Project is a five-year (2005-2010) cooperation project of the Canadian Urban Institute, supported by the Canadian International Development Agency. The Project promotes civic engagement in regional governance, providing opportunities for Ukrainian citizens and communities to shape their common future and to put their region on the path towards sustainable development.

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