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INTRODUCTION

Albanian civil society has evolved considerably during the transition period, with the last three years marking a notable increase of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) across all sectors. The introduction of the NSSD, with its emphasis on the provision of services through civil society, has promoted a rapid increase in the number and diversity of NGOs providing services. In addition, donors continue to prioritise service provision in their funding cycles. Local government decentralisation is also slowly opening up opportunities for the NGO sector. Services include health care, child care, vocational training, care for the physical and mentally disabled, HIV/AIDS awareness, and legal assistance to the victims of corruption and human trafficking.

However, sometimes “Non profit Organisations” (NPOs) (which have replaced the term used for NGOs), have difficulty understanding their role in society and most NPO linked projects are a reflection of donor-defined priorities. While these priorities address the broad development needs of Albania, the dependence of NPOs on donors often prevents them from creating coherent strategies and programmes based on the real needs identified in their specific communities. Generally speaking NPOs have no long-term strategies and almost no systems to develop programmes that contribute to the achievement of this strategy. As a result, the over-reliance on donor-mandated programmes is one of the biggest barriers for NPOs/NGOs to overcome in the future.

8.1 INCREASING CIVIL SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT IN ISSUES OF PUBLIC CONCERN

The two last years witnessed the increase of civil society involvement in public affairs and their positive influence in increasing public awareness and encouraging civic engagement in governmental decision making. This represents an opportunity for citizens to voice their concerns and problems through in some instances in non-politically motivated public protests. Several prominent groups have taken the lead in this process. The Citizens’ Advocacy Office (CAO), the Mjaft movement and the Albanian Youth Council have been most active in setting the tone and the pace of these protests and in articulating critical public concerns on a wide range of issues. Many of these movements have a direct bearing on poverty issues and women’s’ development and empowerment.

The successful Mjaft Campaign articulated the main concerns of Albania’s population on a series of themes in a very attractive and striking approach, which relate to women’s issues. The Mjaft weekly themes included the suffering health and education services; blood feuds; trafficking and organised crime; poverty and unemployment; discrimination against women and disadvantaged groups and others.

These topics were accompanied by comprehensive media coverage and led to a considerable impact on the public unlike other sporadic feeble attempts of civil society in the past.

This mounting pressure for civil society action groups has had an immediate impact on the political process. These groups have now become prominent actors in Albanian civic and political affairs. Following these initiatives, politicians are becoming more aware for their role and its impact on society.

Box 30: Examples of public influence on political behaviour

The Minister of Public Order was forced to resign following a unified protest of journalists and civil society organisations after his alleged beating of a television journalist. In a more recent development public debate reached a promising peak following a governmental plan to back an Italian plan for a waste processing and management factory in the outskirts of Tirana, a plan which was denounced publicly by a unified stance of civil society organizations and Albanian businesses. The Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition have also called representatives of civil society in round table meetings, which are positive signs of an expected greater role of civil society in Albania's development.

8.2 PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN POVERTY REDUCTION

Participation in the NSSED

The CSOs participation in the NSSED process has been very pronounced since 2002 and particularly at the local level. The most visible result of such participation in the poverty reduction process is the acceptance of its role as a respectable actor by the government when designing national policies. This active role cemented the cooperation between the civil society and ministries in determining the range of poverty reduction initiatives in the NSSED. Thus, the sectoral strategic priorities list, presented by the respective sectoral civil society groups was incorporated in the data inputs, which were prepared by line ministry technical working groups and served as a basis for the government consultants when preparing the NSSED. (See Box 31).

However, the lack of an effective monitoring and evaluation system undermines the monitoring of the NSSED by CSOs and local communities. There is also limited awareness of the NSSED strategy at the regional and local levels¹³⁵. This shortcoming will have to be addressed if the NSSED is to achieve its objectives and the outcomes are to be verified.

Participation at the local level

While existing legislation provides for the participation of citizens in decision-making at the local level, this has not effectively been achieved because of (a) the absence of detailed rules at the local level facilitating participation; (b) citizens' lack of awareness of their rights and the responsibilities of local governments; and (c) widespread apathy for civic engagement in governance¹³⁶.

¹³⁵ World Bank Report on "The Legal And Regulatory Environment For Civil Society And Civic Engagement In Albania" May, 2004

¹³⁶ Ibid

Box 31: Action priorities suggested by the civil society in the NSSD¹³⁷

Education

- Financial decentralisation and transparency in resource distribution;
- The need for a draft of national education standards;
- Programmes and projects that would increase the number of students in respective educational levels, as well as the need to encourage private schools and establish regulations for them.

Health

- Restructuring private sector health services, improving health infrastructure;
- Empowering health insurance schemes, introducing of managerial programmes for hospitals, and training of health personnel etc.

Employment Policies;

- Providing stronger support for workers rights through developments in the legislative framework;
- Increasing the capacities of local governments in the area of employment and social services;
- Creating institutional agreements to eliminate the informal labour market;
- Establishing close relationships between professional treatment and the demand of the labour market;
- Development of labour programmes for women and youth;

Social Protection

- Permitting financial norms on economic assistance benefits;
- Expanding and further distribution of social services;
- Drafting continuous programmes about the integration of the vulnerable groups of needs;
- Supporting the social services offered by NGOs etc.

Social Safety

- Promoting the stability of private institutions by offering them equal opportunities;
- Improving the market for social insurance;

Agriculture

- Strengthening of land owners;
- Promoting the food industries;
- Activating funds that guarantee loans to farmers;
- Diversifying crops;
- Marketing growth through infrastructure development; Creating better institutional perspectives, which should respond to farmers' needs.

8.3 CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

A gradual shift of the CSOs from project-focused activities to specialisation in various fields for innovative initiatives in policy processes and advocacy is evident. There is also an emergence of civil society coalitions and networks that gradually recognise the

value of joint action to more effectively address their concerns, efficiently utilise limited resources and influence national policies. The MDGs in this context present a good entry point for providing broader opportunities for these networks to identify, and advocate for the interests of communities and excluded groups. Hence, the capacities of the CSOs ought to be strengthened so they can be engaged effectively in the policy making

¹³⁷ Partners Albania - A study from Anesti Kashta: Public Participation Process during the formulation of the National Strategy for Economic and Social Development 2002-2004) . p.7

processes to ensure the country's move towards achieving the MDGs – as partners, advocates for citizens and excluded groups and as monitors, to hold the government accountable in the development process.

Achieving the MDGs is the collective responsibility of all stakeholders. It is understandable that real participation makes the entire process longer but it is essential to generate a stronger sense of national ownership for implementation and monitoring of MDGs. According to the NSSD Annual progress report (June 2003), the Government remains open to public participation, but there has been limited progress in institutionalising participation in policy making. Participation during the preparation of the NSSD set a precedent for civil society involvement in public policy formulation, but was not sustained. The following steps are considered useful to encourage CSO cooperation:

- The culture of networking among the CSOs can best be fostered through practical initiatives showing the value and benefits of working together as a consolidated civil society force;
- Capacities for conducting credible policy research exist, especially among academic institutions and think tanks, but it should be further enhanced among a wider group of local NGOs;
- Communities need to be empowered to be able to participate equitably and represent themselves in the policy making process.

8.4 VOLUNTEERISM AND PRO-POOR AND PRO-WOMEN POLICIES

When analysing the human development situation of a country, the NHDR highlights achievements, opportunities as well as challenges. Volunteerism is such an enor-

mous asset for social and economic development, that it would seem necessary for the NHDR to shed light on it. Volunteering is a worldwide form of social behaviour deeply embedded in traditional social structures. As a result, its many manifestations are strongly influenced by the histories and cultures from which they emerge. If on an individual level, volunteerism contributes to the capacity building processes by helping the individual volunteer to develop marketable skills, providing access to workplace networks and boosting confidence and self-esteem, on a social level, volunteering makes significant economic and social contributions to development.

First of all, volunteering makes an important economic contribution to society, delivering impressive economic benefits. In countries where volunteer work has been empirically studied, its contributions are estimated to be up to 14 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product. Secondly, participation has long been seen as an essential element of good governance and development that contributes to a more cohesive and stable society. This is a key means by which individuals articulate their engagement as citizens, and build trust and reciprocity among one another. Third, volunteering helps to integrate people into society who are excluded or marginalised, for example women participating in volunteering can offer opportunities for self development and provide a valuable grounding in the practice of citizenship. Finally, volunteering has a role to play in promoting full employment by enhancing the employability of unemployed people, as it can lead to the creation of new jobs by developing services, which are later taken over by the state and market and turned into paid jobs.

The solidarity and creativity of millions of ordinary people, channelled through

volunteerism, are key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Efforts on the part of national governments, supported by the international community, can only complement what ultimately will depend on the full involvement of people and communities. The existing research on and the numerous examples of volunteerism at local, national and international level indicate the importance of volunteerism for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), through building social capital, promoting more participation and self-initiative and thereby establishing or stabilising democratic processes, as well as contributing to economic growth and protecting environmental assets. Volunteerism, as a cross-cutting social behaviour, takes place in all fields of society. Data on formal volunteerism in several countries suggest that a large number of volunteers – individuals and groups – are involved in initiatives related to all the MDGs and their related targets.

In light of these considerations, this National Human Development Report as an advocacy and policy tool, will briefly highlight the opportunities that could be harnessed to further stimulate volunteer contributions to pro-poor and pro-women policies. This will be done, in order to enable national policy and decision-makers to tap the potential of volunteerism for development, as well as to identify the major challenges that should be addressed and overcome to fully release the potential of volunteerism for development.

MDG no. 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Volunteerism for pro-poor policies

Creating opportunities for all members of a community to influence and contribute

to their own development process, is central to activities relating to the reduction of poverty and the improvement of human conditions.

Social cohesion brought about by volunteer action and self-help volunteer groups is an important ingredient in the fight against poverty and hunger; there is ample evidence about the importance of social cohesion (achieved via volunteer practices) and of self-help volunteer groups in the fight against poverty and hunger (the 1st MDG). One illustration is the many micro-credit groups that are very much present and frequent in Albania which revolve around a social dynamic that has characteristics of volunteerism, and strengthens the capacity of the local population for self-administration in their efforts to improve nutrition and other basic needs.

Working primarily at community level with a range of development partners, volunteering focuses on activities aimed at strengthening local capacity, fostering ownership and participation, and building on existing forms of voluntary action as a catalyst for social and economic development – all key components for people-centred and people-driven development.

Within a broad conceptual framework, it is possible to identify at least three main ways through which volunteerism can work for pro-poor policies. First of all through individual volunteers, who thanks to their voluntary actions can help support people living in poor conditions. The work of lot of ordinary volunteers can go from extending technical support to public institutions in poverty mapping and analysis; to assisting in the organisation and coordination of hunger prevention and mitigation plans; providing technical assistance aimed

at enhancing local productive systems and income-generating activities, such as household agriculture, informal sector and rural off-farm activities; or promoting income-generating activities, such as training farmers to use the Internet and other information and telecommunications technology (ICT) or marketing handicraft produced by unemployed artisans more effectively over the Internet.

Secondly, volunteerism can work for pro-poor policies through volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs), enabling community groups to prioritise needs and engage in development initiatives or encouraging and supporting community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to become providers of development resources such as micro finance and extension services, especially in remote areas.

Finally, through volunteer networks, volunteer activism can empower local groups, such as associations or cooperatives, to share good practices on production methods, natural resource management and disease control. As previously mentioned the essential role played by civil society as a partner to achieve the targets of this MDG has already been widely recognised. This is evidence of the importance of volunteerism, which is embedded in civil society action. In addition, in order to be effective and sustainable, development initiatives need to be solidly anchored at the grass root level. The action of networks of volunteer groups range from the grassroots to the global level, the above-mentioned civil society organizations being one example among many. Therefore, by becoming partners in global alliances, volunteer groups can help to anchor such alliances at the grassroots.

MDG no. 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Volunteerism for pro-women policies

Although it is not the only determining factor, poverty has a noticeable effect on the social exclusion of individuals, families and various groups of the population such as women. Women play a pivotal role in family and in social cohesion and are engaged in a wide range of economic activities. Their voluntary and collective engagement in development constitutes a formidable force for social and economic transformation.

Volunteerism has also been instrumental for the 3rd MDG, related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. While there is still need for improvement, many gains have been achieved during the past few decades, and volunteerism, through activism, significantly contributed to a change in societies' attitudes towards women. There have been a multitude of initiatives to empower women, the small self-help cooperatives worldwide being one example which secure additional income for women through sale and marketing of their hand-woven fabrics. Volunteering uses its outreach capacity and its proximity to volunteer-involving organisations and its networks, to help tap the huge potential of women for development and social change. It further provides practical support to women's groups in such areas as literacy, effective management, financial systems, micro-credit, and income generation.

Volunteer activists form the back-bone of the international's women's movement, raising their voices on policies that have impact on women, speaking from their everyday practical experience on the ground. Working to mainstream gender through society, they assist development institutions to map

and collect data on gender disparities; develop the capacity of institutions to properly use gender specific data at local and national levels; provide technical support to programmes targeting single mothers; promote the potential of the Internet and other information and communications technology (ICT) as a library of information and research tools, and to raise awareness and assist national initiatives promoting female education.

Through volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs), the concept of volunteerism can work for pro-women policies helping local groups advocate for compulsory education for girls as well as boys; supporting initiatives related to protecting female teenagers, including family planning; promoting advocacy activities for a greater gender bal-

ance in key institutions such as parliaments and training gender-focused organizations in intensive use of information and communication technology for advocacy work. Finally volunteer networks help expand national and international networks of gender-promoting VIOs and facilitate the exposure of gender-oriented VIOs to innovative approaches on gender equality by like-minded organizations.

While these points highlight only a few examples of the involvement of volunteers in helping meet the goals set by the international community in the Millennium Declaration, they exemplify how volunteerism plays a crucial role in all targets of MDGs regarding the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Box 32: “Volunteerism brings change” – at least for Radat women

Finally, water is coming into Radat. It is not a dream anymore but just the simple truth. Years and years of suffering finally came to an end, and all of this due to volunteerism and Community Based Organizations. Radat village is stretched out over Dropulli Poshtëm Commune, bordering with Greece. It is the last village of the commune not only from the geographical position, but also economically. None had ever reached out to this village before, to do something for the villagers. But, this fact did not stop Local Governance Programme to help villagers create their CBO. Radat CBO was formed on February 2004 and they immediately registered their CBO in Dropulli i Poshtëm commune. After lots of meeting between them to discuss the main priorities of the village, Radat CBO managed, with the help of Dropulli commune and LGP staff in Dropulli i Poshtëm commune, to implement a solution to one of the basic problems the “Construction of Water Supply System”.

All the villagers are old people nearly 60-70 years old, there is just one young man who is forced to live there because of his family problems. Water has been a real problem in this village. Women were obliged to go and carry water from two km away with the help of animals or by carrying barrels. It is not the distance that kills me,- said one of the women, but now I am not a young woman anymore. I need water twice a day to supply the needs of my family and the domestic animals we keep, -she said, which takes me four hours a day. Thanks to UNDP and the commune, now we have water and we have no more problems.

It was great to see all the women and men with their spades and shovels opening up the channels. Age did not matter for them to be able to construct the deposes at the top of the village. They carried all the materials by animals and they finished constructing the depo in a record time for their age. It does not matter if you live at the top of the hill or down in the field, if you have the will and if you are united you can make changes for the better, said the Head of Radat CBO Mr. Jorgo Mari. First, we didn't believe it, but now that water is coming to our homes I am convinced that volunteerism and unity can reach everywhere even the highest place, more than the government itself.