



USAID
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BULGARIA

CASE STUDY

Association of Community Foundations Up and Running

Sustainable Community Funds Benefit Local Communities



A children's playground in Stara Zagora, renovated by the local community fund, is now full of color and children's laughter.

"The assistance we received from USAID through these training programs gave a strong boost to the development of the community fund model in Bulgaria. The opportunity to see in person the work of community funds elsewhere was exceptionally important. This led us to believe in our own abilities and inspired us to work even harder."

--Daniela Dimitrova, Director of the Association of Community Foundations

Challenge

Local philanthropy has deep roots in Bulgaria. It is essential that these be revived and enhanced at the community level so that people can participate actively in the development of their own communities in areas that the central and national bodies may not consider priorities.

Initiative

USAID supported a multi-year Community Funds project that focused on development of community foundations (or funds) that harness the potential of local business, local government, local NGOs and others to work together to define community needs and seek resources with which to address them. This work was supported extensively by the USAID Participant Training Program (PTP), with two U.S. study tours, a European study tour, in-country conferences and seminars, and small grants, all aimed at helping the young community fund boards learn from and draw upon the experience and insight of similar bodies that have been successful in the U.S., Poland, Russia and other countries. In addition to focusing on management issues and developing community partnerships, key topics in the training have always included attracting and working with donors, the importance of PR, and the potential of developing a national association that works in the interest of the individual foundations.

Result

When USAID technical assistance for community foundations ended last year, the project left behind a brand-new national Association of Community Foundations in Bulgaria established by the six foundations that were operational at the time. Since then, the Association has thrived and the number of active foundations has grown to ten. On February 8, 2007, the Association held a "Donor of the Year" ceremony for the second time. Judging from the energy and professionalism of this event, the Association and its members are up and running, and sustainable. At the event, the Association put into action some key principles learned from USAID assistance and training: the importance of acknowledging key donors and philanthropists, and the importance of putting aside differences when working through the Association on national-level events. Several awards were presented to individual and corporate donors and a variety of partners, and spirits were high. The effect of publicly recognizing key donors and partners is that other potential donors and partners are stirred to action. The collaboration of all of the foundations under the umbrella of the Association means that greater public outreach is possible, generating more publicity for both the association and its community-level members, and yielding more enthusiastic partnerships and more successful fundraising. Community funds in Bulgaria have implemented projects such as renovations of hospitals, improvement of playgrounds, and boosting computer literacy in schools.