

**“THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN BUILDING TRUST AND GOOD GOVERNANCE
IN MOSTAR”**

Summary: The Key Findings of the Research

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Introduction

As citizens' associations, the non-governmental organizations in Mostar, primarily those whose activities correspond with the subject of this research (should) directly provide and support, more or less successfully, organized citizens' engagement that initiates trust, encourages communications and contributes to the models of collective acting for the common good of the local community seeking constructive ways of interaction of all participants in development, which is necessary especially in societies that still feel the consequences of heavy war destruction, such as Mostar.

Chapter VI of the Decision on implementation and reorganization of the city of Mostar established the Confidence-building Committee, comprised of experts in different areas of relevant expertise, representatives of civil society and political and religious leaders. Chapter VI also defined the role of non-governmental organizations as a part of civil society and identified their key importance in reducing tensions, alleviating conflicts and building trust in ethnically still-divided society in Mostar during implementation of the Statute of Mostar, which came into effect on the 15th March 2004 and the reorganizations of the city of Mostar.

The potential and the role of non-government organizations in the field of explicitly expressed need for building trust and good governance in Mostar must be evaluated and improved.

The Purpose and Methodology of the Research

The purpose of this research work was to research and evaluate different aspects of engagement of NGOs in interaction with other participants in development (authorities, international and domestic governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, citizens and businesses/private sector, media and educational institutions) in renewing trust between different communities that live in Mostar and building the trust of citizens in authorities and principles of good governance that have to be respected.

The aim of the research work, therefore, was, through application and combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of compiling and analyzing data (surveying, interviewing, working in focus groups, and analyzing contents), to research and analyze, by the present situation and activity of the non-government organizations active in the defined areas, critically evaluate the possible options for improvement and recommend the best feasible strategy in given circumstances and legal framework with participation of all the relevant active participants, and creating a basis for dissemination of the results and for advocating changes, where the research showed necessary.

From 31st July 1997 to 9th September 2004, in Herzegovina-Neretva canton, approximately 700 citizens' associations registered with the competent Ministry for Justice, Public Administration and Local Self-Management HNK/HNZ. Naturally, not all these associations are active today, but there is no complete or updated data base in the Ministry that would correspond with the actual situation, primarily because certain NGOs, although obliged by the Law, do not duly notify the Ministry about their status changes. About 9% of these associations have the primary mission

that corresponds with the subject of this research work and their headquarters and/or activities are in the Mostar area, which makes them relevant for analysis.

68 non-governmental organizations are either registered or carry out activities in the Mostar area, whose statute-declared mission corresponds with the subject of this research. They were asked to take part in the research through filling in the survey form for non-governmental organizations. Out of 68 forms sent out, 25 non-governmental organizations responded by filling in the survey form, 21 (45,5%) did not, and 22 (32%) of the survey forms sent out were returned. This was because the recipients were not at the addresses that are registered as the headquarters of their relevant non-governmental organizations with the Ministry of Justice, management and local self-management of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton. Therefore, out of 46 potential respondents, 25 non-governmental organizations (54,5%) responded to the survey form for non-government organizations, which can be considered sufficient for the nature of this research.

Apart from the non-governmental organizations, as primary groups of respondents, the other target groups of the research are:

Media – electronic and printed local media and those who have correspondence offices in Mostar, therefore, covering the Mostar region. Out of 16 media organizations, it was not possible to establish contact with two, 9 (64%) responded to the survey form for the media in Mostar, and 5 (36%) did not, which can also be considered a sufficient number of respondents for this research.

Educational Institutions (primary, secondary schools and universities), out of which 37 primary and secondary schools are relevant for this research, since in their curricula they cover human rights, democracy, and citizenship education, as separate subjects or within certain lessons. Out of 37 primary and secondary schools in Mostar, 22 (59%) responded by filling in the survey form for primary and secondary schools in Mostar, 15 (41%) did not, which is sufficient for this research. Groups of students from the University Dzemal Bijedic in Mostar and the University of Mostar were also interviewed.

Citizens and the private business sector – a sample of 50 citizens and representatives of the private business sector of Mostar was formed by the method of random sample and encompasses different ages, sexes, educational, professional, and national structure of the Mostar population, and, based on the public data on the representatives of the private business sector that support the work of NGOs and/or those whose business activities have been noticed in Mostar. These samples were used through survey and interviews, as an illustration, with the aim of obtaining some of the attitudes of the citizens and the private business sector of Mostar to the non-governmental organizations in Mostar.

Politicians in Mostar: holders of the Lists of political parties candidates, coalitions, and the independent candidates for the City Council of Mostar, approved by the Electoral Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina for participation in the municipal elections held on the 2nd October 2004 – therefore, those who and/or whose parties/coalitions were active in the electoral campaign, came into power, that is, the council seats in the City Council of Mostar or today represent opposition, therefore all those who together make up the political scene of Mostar. Out of 27 holders of the political parties lists, coalitions, independent candidates, one was out of reach, and 16 (61,5%) responded to the survey form for the holders of the political parties lists, coalitions, and the independent candidates for the City Council of Mostar, approved by the electoral Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina for participation in the

municipal elections held on the 2nd October 2004, which can be, therefore, considered sufficient for this research work.

Domestic and international experts from organizations and the areas relevant for the research: authorities, educational institutions, media, national and international organizations, political parties were consulted and/or interviewed.

The Key Findings of the Research

Not one group of respondents (non-governmental organizations, authorities/politicians, educational institutions, media, citizens and private business sector) do not generally think that the influence and the role of non-governmental organizations in building trust and good governance in Mostar are great, but evaluate them as small to medium.

Also, not one group of respondents thinks that the situation the non-governmental organizations in Mostar are in is good, but satisfactory or poor.

All the respondent groups think that amongst the most needed activities of non-governmental organizations in Mostar are those whose primary activity is building/keeping peace, democracy and improvement and protection of human rights, as well as the activities of educational, scientific and research non-governmental organizations.

Also, all the respondent groups are open to cooperation with non-governmental organizations, but great responsibility for improvement of cooperation lies with the non-governmental organizations themselves.

The most positive image on non-governmental organizations in Mostar was expressed by authorities/politicians, followed by the educational institutions, which generally see the non-governmental organizations as a “good opportunity for citizens to organize themselves and in such a way solve important social issues” (41% politicians; 25% schools), and that “many capable people are not organized in political parties/politically active, but their opinion and activities, thanks to non-governmental organizations, are “felt” by the public (24% politicians; 21% schools).

The readiness for improvement of relationship with non-governmental sector was shown by the authorities. Not one respondent expressed the attitude that “it is not necessary to establish cooperation between authorities and non-governmental organizations”.

Authorities and politicians mostly see the relationship between authorities and non-governmental organizations as a “partnership relationship (constant joint striving to achieve prosperity for the society as a whole)” (38%) and as a “relationship of cooperation (cooperation in activities which contribute to efficient realization of certain program objectives)”(50%), whilst only two respondents evaluated the relationship between authorities and non-governmental organizations as “relationship of confrontation (opposition regarding interests, goals and methodology of operating)”(12%).

“Joint participation in producing laws, public discussions (45%), preparation of amendments, public campaigns, mutual exchange of documentation, information and ideas which can contribute to a more efficient realization of the program activities (25%), and development of cooperation between political parties and non-governmental organizations in establishing democratic institutions for control over authorities (30%)”, are the relationships between authorities and non-governmental organizations which most of the respondents would support.

Besides their engagement in a political party and participation in authorities or opposition, if they decide to additionally engage in solving certain social problems in Mostar, they would mainly do it through “addressing the public through the media, and joining and acting in one of the existing non-governmental organizations” (30%).

The media mostly think that “ the majority of non-governmental organizations represent the means for skillful individuals to earn money and gain influence” (27%) and that “ non-governmental organizations serve only the interests of individuals and foreign countries and their foundations with whose help they are organized and financed” (13%) but also that “without these organizations and independent media it is not possible to limit and control the authorities”(20%), and a few respondents amongst the media think that “non-governmental organizations represent a good opportunity for the citizens to organize themselves and thus solve important social issues” (13%). As the most frequent problem in communication between non-governmental organizations and the media, the majority of respondents from the media group says that “NGOs do not have sufficient knowledge on public relations (38%) and the use of modern communication technologies in public relations (31%)”, and that it is easiest for NGOs to place information in the public domain through media “if the information is current (43%) and if the media event is well organized (38%)”.

The respondents from the group of non-governmental organizations mostly evaluated their cooperation with the media as satisfactory and good. The same evaluation was given by the respondents from the target group media. Both respondent groups agree that the cooperation needs to be improved further.

In Mostar, and the situation is similar throughout BH, with few exceptions, individual and collective philanthropy is still insufficiently developed, unlike the corporate philanthropy which is “often considered as a network of not-for-profit organizations and foundations which offer voluntary contributions for the common good”. Cooperation between non-governmental organizations and the business private sector was evaluated as the least developed, and this cooperation could contribute to more secure sustainability of the non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, the citizens as individuals are those who can through their engagement significantly support the activities of non-governmental organizations.

Citizens and the private business sector have divided opinions on non-governmental organizations, in which nonetheless a slightly negative attitude prevails towards non-governmental organizations, including distrust in their work, insufficient knowledge of their achievements, lack of information on their activities (60%), but also the opinion that non-governmental organizations are necessary in Mostar and that their influence has to be noticed through their activities with concrete, visible and measurable results, with the aim, principally, of satisfying the needs of the local population and with transparent work (40%).

As the key factors for stimulation of voluntary contributions to non-governmental organizations the respondents – citizens and private business sector-consider: the activities of NGOs which have concrete objective and tasks, are transparently carried out, have good media coverage and, most importantly, whose results are visible, with a special emphasis on human rights, youth, and humanitarian work.

As the most important factors which discourage voluntary contributions to NGOs the following were singled out: unfavorable economic situation, distrust in the activities of non-governmental organizations, lack of information on their actions,

discouraging existing legal regulations, and the lack of or an under-developed culture/awareness on the needs and importance of voluntary contributions.

Both the private business sector and citizens are of an opinion that improved tax relief and simplifying of the procedure for voluntary contributions to NGOs would have an encouraging effect on philanthropy (85%).

The respondents for the educational institutions target group think that education on NGOs as formations of citizens', democratic society contributes to development of citizenship identity in young people.

Educational institutions are open for even more successful cooperation with NGOs, but certain respondents point out that they do not know which NGOs to approach for cooperation.

Favorable conditions for developing cooperation, the respondents think, are educational character of schools and NGOs, the same or similar target groups, the need for education of the young people, enrichment of educational and extracurricular educational contents, and contribution to opening schools for cooperation with other active participants in the society.

The majority of the respondents from this target group think that "adequate coordination of work and activity of NGOs in the same or related areas of interest, as well educational and media campaigns for raising awareness on importance of NGO engagement would contribute to improvement of the situation and cooperation between NGOs and schools. It is important that the activities of NGOs suggested to educational institutions are in accordance with the pupils' interests, proposed timely and feasible.

Recommendations

Recommendations for a feasible strategy for improvement of the role of non-governmental organizations in building trust and good governance in Mostar through interaction of all participants in development:

"For more successful and more effective work of NGOs, it would be necessary as follows:

- To determine basic criteria which NGOs can work on certain activities;
- To permanently educate the staff in professional and organizational sense for their work in NGOs;
- To propose and to determine specific projects and programs that citizens really need, save for projects that donors prefer;
- To establish good cooperation among NGOs, the cooperation that would be better that it has been so far, especially among organizations which have similar or same activities;
- To establish a joint (among many NGOs) organization, completion of "more serious" projects or parts of the projects,
- and to approach all the projects with more seriousness and responsibility," because "due to the social improper organization, i.e. poor organization on all government levels and lack of the rule of law in the situation of numerous unresolved needs of poor ordinary citizens, there is an open space for full and diverse work of NGOs."¹

¹ According to: Association of Citizens for Human Rights Protection «ZGP», Mostar, survey form filled in for the purposes of this research work.

The readiness of authorities for improvement of relationship with non-governmental sector has been shown, but is up to non-governmental organizations to:

- first of all, through building their personnel capacities, knowledge and skills prove to authorities and protagonists of the political scene in Mostar as a serious and capable partner in achieving common good for the local community,
- with a special emphasis on the responsibility of the NGOs which have as their primary mission building trust and good governance in Mostar, through activities in the field, direct assistance to the local community, and especially, research in the areas of public policies, lobbying and advocacy.

Significant shifts can be achieved through:

- successful coordination of activities of NGOs in the same or related areas,
- personnel training of NGOs,
- well conceived activities based on the needs of the local community,
- constant monitoring and analysis of the situation in their area of interest,
- professional presentation of an idea to a sponsor and
- transparency in their work, because “financial means can always be found for a good project”.

Non-governmental organizations have to prove and clarify their role and importance to the public through concrete results.

Both the non-governmental organizations and the media should deepen their knowledge on each other, and improve cooperation in a way that would enable the non-governmental organizations to adequately use the power of the media for their successful activities.

Adequate coordination of the work and activities of NGOs in the same or related areas of interest, as well as educational and media campaigns for raising awareness on importance of NGO engagement would contribute to improvement of the situation and cooperation between NGOs and schools.

It is important that the NGO activities suggested to educational institutions are in accordance with the pupils’ interests, timely proposed and feasible.

Conclusion

By strengthening the personnel capacities of NGOs and using favorable conditions for cooperation with other participants in development, the influence and the role of non-governmental organizations in building trust and good governance in Mostar can be/will be improved. There is universal readiness for it.