



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING IN SLOVAKIA 1993-1999

**Report of a Program Evaluation
March 2000**

Evaluation Team

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Slovakia Map (program areas are shaded)

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The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

PREFACE

Citizens are the heart of democracy; they give tangible expression to its principles and purpose, and direction to its institutions. For democratic societies to develop and endure, citizens need to exercise their rights and responsibilities. Without the active involvement of citizens in political life, government power can be abused and misused, and the promise of democracy can go unrealized. Because democracy requires informed participation, citizens must know and understand basic ideas of citizenship, politics and government. They need knowledge to make decisions about the proper use of authority, and the skills to voice their concerns and to hold government officials accountable. Democracy also requires a political willingness on the part of many women and men, and the opportunity for citizens to put their knowledge and skills into action.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations; safeguard elections; and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government. In many countries, however, advocates of democracy lack both the requisite institutions and experience. NDI provides training and technical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices, and institutions.

Community organizing is one approach used by NDI to help increase citizen participation in political processes. Broadly speaking, community organizing is a means of educating and empowering citizens, by fostering voluntary collective action and making public officials responsive to the expressed needs of the community. Ideally, this leads to more democratic political power relations. Community organizing involves the recruitment and training of local civic leaders and the empowerment of membership-based organizations capable of sustained, public-policy advocacy initiatives. Citizens exercise and gain power through collective political undertakings that, in turn, help bring about desired changes in policies or processes.

Soon after Slovakia became independent in 1993, NDI began a community organizing program designed to help citizens become politically active; notwithstanding that the national political environment during most of this period was authoritarian and uncongenial to citizens' political initiatives. This work eventually encompassed six years of programming in three regions of Slovakia, and was funded with approximately \$790,500 from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and \$926,800 from the US Agency for International Development (USAID). NDI recently conducted a final, qualitative evaluation of its community organizing work in Slovakia. This is a report of that evaluation.

The evaluation began with an extensive document review in Washington and then with a three-member team holding key informant interviews and roundtable discussions in Slovakia from October 10 through October 18, 1999. The process culminated with an analysis of findings and the drafting of this report. The evaluation team designed the evaluation with the overall purpose of helping NDI improve its citizen participation initiatives and make decisions about the appropriate circumstances for community organizing programs. The report has been reviewed by virtually all the people who worked on the program over the years and their thoughts and reactions have been taken into account. The written comments of NDI's

former Central and East European regional director Susan Atwood appear as the first appendix of the document (See Appendix 1). At the time of the evaluation, the Slovak programs constituted the Institute's longest running and most intensive community organizing initiative. The authors hope that this report will be used to help enhance the quality of future efforts.

A grant from the National Endowment for Democracy enabled NDI to undertake this evaluation. Comments and questions can be directed to NDI Senior Program Officer Aaron Azelton (aaron@ndi.org).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From late 1993 until September 1999, NDI conducted community organizing programs in Slovakia. The evaluation team determined that the programs had some positive results within the context of Slovakia's difficult and uneven democratic transition. The team concluded that community organizing was possible and practical in Slovakia. Moreover, the programs succeeded in bringing about an increase (or periodic increases) in political participation of citizens in the communities targeted. NDI successfully fostered the creation of community-based coalitions that endure to this day. These groups, in Trencin and Presov, have mobilized citizens, organized candidate forums, and conducted advocacy campaigns emanating from citizen survey results. In cities throughout central Slovakia, NDI helped groups of citizens initiate collective political actions and begin to influence public policies. (See Appendix 2 for a description of actions) The programs, however, did not entirely meet the stated objectives: the programs fell short of delivering the quality and frequency of collective citizen participation expected; and the organizational capacity left behind (in terms of trained community organizers and active, membership driven organizations) was less than NDI originally envisioned.

Political Context

In 1989, the "Velvet Revolution" swept across the People's Republic of Czechoslovakia as citizens stood together in repudiation of communism and autocratic government control. Following these revolutionary developments, Czech and Slovak political leaders mutually agreed to the creation of a separate Slovakia and Czech Republic in 1993. After centuries of occupation by a succession of foreign powers and 75 years of confederation with the Czech lands, Slovakia gained full independence.

After independence and in contrast to the Czech Republic's early, swift strides toward democratic governance Slovakia seemed to revert quickly back to a political system that closely resembled communist traditions. The emergence of Vladimir Meciar and his ascension to the position of Prime Minister led to a repressive political environment that stifled the legitimate growth of political competition, subjugated the rule of law to arbitrary government decisionmaking, and limited basic freedoms. Government-sponsored political, and sometimes physical, attacks on opponents in the parliament, judiciary, media, and civil society undermined basic democratic principles and discouraged participatory political activity before Slovaks had had the opportunity to learn how to defend and exercise their rights.

The parliamentary elections of 1998, in which a coalition of democratic parties prevailed over Meciar, signaled a turning point in Slovakia's democratic transition. The dislodging of the Meciar regime came about in large part thanks to civic initiatives that enhanced the integrity of the electoral process, and demonstrated the underlying democratic inclinations of the society.

NDI-s Initial Appraisal

It was during Slovakia-s early transition period that NDI began conducting community organizing programs. A survey mission dispatched by NDI in 1993 noted that Slovak citizens suffered from communist-inspired apathy and lacked the abilities needed to participate in political activities. The survey also found that political space was closed at the national level and around the Slovak capital city of Bratislava. Based on these findings, NDI chose to conduct community organizing activities at a local level outside the capital area. These activities were intended to increase participatory political practices and provide a model that perhaps could be replicated around Slovakia.

Community Organizing

As NDI now understands more clearly after six years of experience, community organizing has a number of particular characteristics that make it a unique and potentially powerful vehicle for political participation. Broadly speaking, community organizing is a means of educating and empowering citizens, by fostering voluntary collective action aimed at making public officials responsive to the expressed needs of the community. This can then lead to altered power relations. Community organizing is typically undertaken in places where citizens initially lack the skills and/or the willingness needed to come together and work on common problems.

Effective community organizing requires skilled and seasoned *community organizers*. A community organizer typically enters a community from outside and acts as catalyst responsible for providing citizens with a sense of their own power and with skills that they can use to affect change collectively. By entering a community from outside, organizers are able to avoid possible conflicts of interest that may arise with people who live in the community. They are also able to remain somewhat detached from the emotional side of certain issues and thus able to provide more even-handed guidance. Effective community organizers are simultaneously agitators, reflectors, strategic planners, tacticians, teachers, and professionals that keep a participatory process of change moving forward.

The process of organizing generally begins with the organizers conducting citizen interviews and a community power analysis. (See Appendix 3) The power analysis provides information about the form and function of official and unofficial power in a community. The citizen interviews help the organizer begin to establish relationships, learn about community concerns, and recruit potential community leaders. In the United States, for instance, these activities alone may take up to a year. This formative stage takes time because, for the first time, people are learning about political issues and how they might actually take action to resolve problems affecting their daily lives. The organizer is also taking time to help them think about what it means to create an effective, democratic organization of citizens. There must be explicit discussions about styles of leadership, decisionmaking, influence, power and accountability. Potential leaders and other interested citizens are drawn into this formative process while they simultaneously fulfill their other obligations as workers, spouses and parents. Once completed, however, a nascent democratic organization **C** with a local leadership and membership **C** will begin to form around common concerns and issues. Some initial organizational activities would include the election of leaders and defining issues to be

addressed through collective action.

After helping the organization form and assisting it to define issues, the organizer will help move the organization toward collective actions to achieve concrete improvements in people's lives. For instance, citizens may want to work to improve local transportation, housing, schools, childcare or health care. It is important to understand, however, that the organization defines these issues in terms of solutions. In the case of improving transportation, for example, the issue may be defined as doubling the number of buses that serve an area and extending the hours of operation in the community, rather than defined simply as inadequate bus service.

The organizer helps facilitate the development of strategic advocacy campaign plans, as well as corresponding plans for recruiting new members and reaching out to other groups. Throughout the organizing process, the organizer is coaching leaders and members on the use of power, and also helping them to develop a range of skills (e.g., interviewing, listening, meeting management, planning). Concurrently, the organizer is shifting more and more responsibilities and initiatives to the local community leaders. Over time (typically three years or so in the American experience), the organization will develop the community organizing capacity necessary to initiate and carry out new campaigns with only minor assistance from the original organizer. Effective organizations perpetuate themselves by having missions and mechanisms geared toward developing new leaders and expanding membership.

Community organizing is a step-by-step building process that necessarily involves increasing the willingness and ability of citizens to participate politically. The systematization of the process leads to lasting, quality results in terms of citizen participation. Taking short cuts, on the other hand, would be like putting the paint on the side of a house before the primer. The paint job may look good initially, but in a short period of time the paint will begin to peel and require constant maintenance because of an inadequate foundation. Community organizing similarly depends on the deliberate creation of a strong organizational foundation that will support citizens' continuous and collective participation. This is particularly true in situations where there are no established democratic social or political traditions. These traditions must be developed, nurtured and reinforced.

The Slovakia Program in Brief

NDI's community organizing activities in Slovakia began in July 1994 with a NED-funded program. An NDI representative launched the first program in Trencin, a city located approximately 100 miles northeast of Bratislava. The representative helped form a citywide coalition of existing groups around local policy issues. As a result, the Trencin Informal Association (TNZ) became officially registered in 1995. From Trencin, NDI expanded its NED-funded community organizing work to the eastern city of Presov in March 1996, helping Slovaks form the Presov Civic Forum (POF), a coalition of preexisting local groups.

The **objectives** of the Trencin and Presov programs each included: creating sustainable community coalitions capable of public policy advocacy; increasing informed citizen participation; increasing collaboration and advocacy through the formation of a country-wide network of NGOs; and producing

instructional materials to help promote organizing throughout Slovakia.

In March 1996, with USAID funding, NDI expanded its community organizing work to Banska Bystrica and three other central Slovakia communities. NDI initially planned a one-year program to train 20 organizers, but under the guidance of the newly-hired resident representative in Banska Bystrica NDI reconsidered the program duration and objectives. Consequently, NDI began a program, with a three-year timetable, to train a group of organizers who would then cultivate local leaders and help them build community-level, membership organizations capable of conducting advocacy campaigns. This approach differed from the previous work in Trencin and Presov, where NDI had formed coalitions among existing organizations.

The revised **objectives** (as of November 1997) of the Banska Bystrica program included: 10 trained organizers; active and independent community-based organizations; and the institutionalization of community organizing practices.

NDI Accomplishments

Throughout the duration of its programs, NDI seems to have been one of very few organizations working to involve citizens in Slovakia's public policy making processes. In so doing, NDI introduced principles and practices that helped Slovaks begin transforming a political culture characterized by non-participation and deference to illegitimate authority (a political culture that was, at the same time, experiencing increasing degrees of autocracy under the Meciar government). The NDI programs resulted in a litany of accomplishments that illustrate an increase in citizen activism.

With approximately \$790,500 from NED, NDI successfully fostered the creation of community-based coalitions that endure to this day. These groups, in Trencin and Presov, have mobilized citizens, organized candidate forums, and conducted advocacy campaigns emanating from citizen survey results. As a matter of fact, NDI's Trencin program first introduced candidate forums during the 1994 parliamentary elections. Other groups have since replicated the model and candidate forums are now a staple pre-election, citizen activity in communities throughout Slovakia. This is an example of how the program has positively impacted Slovak politics by changing the way citizens participate.

Also, according to NDI reports, the TNZ gathered more than 800 citizen surveys in 1995; 50 organizations were involved in inaugural meeting of POF in 1997; and an average of 100 citizens attended a series of townhall meetings organized in both Trencin and Presov.

NDI also introduced TNZ and POF staff members to organizational development skills needed for sustainability (e.g., project planning, proposal writing, organizational decisionmaking, and event organizing). The Trencin and Presov groups continue to exist today, although they appear to be struggling with complex issues related to organizational mission, management, and fundraising. During the 1998 election that resulted in a change of political regime, however, both groups played notable roles in the OK 98

campaign.¹ According to information generated by the Slovak government statistics office, Presov and Trencin had some of the highest levels of voter turnout in the country.² Moreover, individuals trained by NDI in Trencin and Presov have taken on other civil society leadership roles. For example, a former NDI staff assistant in Presov is now the director of the Presov Community Foundation, which channels financial support to groups conducting community development activities.

The programs also resulted in the creation of a training manual in the Slovak language, which was distributed to civil society organizations throughout Slovakia. The manual draws on Slovak examples of citizen activism, in order to illustrate and explain the process of community organizing.

NDI's \$926,800 USAID-funded program in Banska Bystrica and central Slovakia also bore several positive results. By training Slovak organizers and, in turn, fostering local leaders and the development of nascent community organizations, the program introduced grassroots organizing as a political form. The community organizing activities helped transform the way citizens in select communities think and act. Over the course of three years, the work began to provide citizens with demonstrable influence and a recognized voice in decisionmaking. Several organizing campaigns allowed citizens to identify and address community problems through collective action and advocacy techniques. For instance, 90 citizens were actively involved in an advocacy campaign that led the Nitra municipal government to finance public housing repairs in 1999. The further development and sustainability of this work is being undertaken currently by the Citizen Action Center in Banska Bystrica. The Center is an independent, NDI-created organization with the continuing mission of promoting and supporting community organizing.³

Evaluation Findings and Lessons Learned

Despite these successful developments, the evaluation team determined that both the NED-funded and USAID-funded programs failed to meet some of the stated objectives. NDI's incomplete understanding of the typical purpose and process of community organizing at the outset and the consequent development of unrealistic objectives under the given time frames significantly weakened program design and execution. Although NDI hired expatriate resident representatives with organizing backgrounds, in retrospect it appears that NDI did not understand that institutionalizing the practice of organizing would depend to a significant extent on having a senior community organizing professional on the ground for two to three years, as is the norm for this type of work in the United States. Turnover of expatriate staff due to funding limitations was a recurring issue.

¹ The OK 98 represented a coalition of civic groups from around the country that came together to conduct voter education and get-out-the-vote activities during the 1998 parliamentary elections.

² Information on the 1998 election results is available from the Slovak Government Statistical Office www.statistics.sk.

³ The Citizen Action Center, Strieborne nam. 2, 97401 Banska Bystrica, Slovakia, **Office Tel:** 421.88.4156.058, **Fax:** 4156.057, **Mobile Phone:** 421. 905.654.212, **Director:** Chuck Hirt
E-mail: hirt@changenet.sk

In October 1999, the evaluation team found that the TNZ in Trencin and POF in Presov, although staffed by committed and determined people, seemed to be muddling along without clear missions, no medium or long-term plans, weak governing bodies, and inactive memberships. The groups have steadily moved away from community organizing and advocacy since their creation. They are no longer purposefully increasing and sustaining citizen input into policy making. Nowadays, they are content simply to inform citizens about elections and the results of community surveys, and to provide venues for exchanges of information.

This does not mean that the Trencin and Presov groups are not making positive contributions to democratic life in Slovakia. There is certainly a place in Slovakia for groups that solicit citizen viewpoints and provide practical information. NDI did not, however, train the groups to play this role specifically. An institutionalized capacity for local level organizing and advocacy is, as of yet, unrealized on a broad scale. Consequently, active citizen participation in political processes outside of elections appears limited.

The USAID-funded program elements examined by the evaluation team appeared relatively weak, although still developing and improving. The 10 organizers recruited and trained over the course of the program lack some fundamental abilities, even after three years of training in some cases (e.g., they lack clear visions of what can be achieved, they are not able to train others in the art of organizing, they are not significantly expanding or empowering leaders). The community organizations that NDI helped develop are also not yet vibrant or active in terms of creating new leaders, recruiting new members, initiating new campaigns, or raising money. The organizing campaigns initiated have been few and far between in most communities. However, the campaigns seem to be increasing in frequency. At the same time, campaigns do not seem to have been used as a means to expand organizational membership or to develop new leaders, as would be normally expected with community organizing. These shortcomings need to be acknowledged in the context of the stated program objectives.

Conclusion

The community organizing programs did result in several positive outcomes. The ideas and practices associated with community organizing have been introduced and continue to be expanded. A large number of citizens have participated in activities ranging from candidate forums to advocacy campaigns. Furthermore, the formal organizations that NDI helped create still exist and have the capacity to add value in their communities. The team believes that the training of community organizers is an important initiative that should be strongly considered for replication by NDI in other emerging democracies. Therefore, it is especially important to look critically at the Slovakia experience.

The evaluation team has tried to interpret the intended and unintended results within the larger context of Slovakia's political and social transition. The team has also attempted to identify some operational lessons that may help improve the quality of NDI's future community organizing programs. The "Findings and Recommendations" section of this report provides the evaluation team's opinions about what worked, what did not work, and why.

SLOVAKIA PROGRAM CHRONOLOGIES

Political Climate in 1993

NDI conducted community organizing programs in Slovakia beginning in 1993. By the time the Institute concluded its program in 1999, Slovakia had taken large steps toward a constitutional democracy following the 1998 elections. After six years of rule by the nationalist regime of Vladimir Meciar, a broad coalition of parties came together and succeeded in providing a viable democratic political option that won an overwhelming victory; a victory supported by intense civil society activism.

After independence in 1993, Slovakia seemed to fall back on habits of governance that resembled communist practices. The ascension of Vladimir Meciar to the position of Prime Minister led to a repressive political environment that stifled the legitimate growth of political competition, subjugated the rule of law, and limited basic freedoms. Government-sponsored political, and sometimes physical, attacks on opponents in the parliament, judiciary, media, and civil society betrayed the basic democratic principles and limited participatory political activity.

Instead of embracing a more participatory, responsive system of government, Slovak citizens became increasingly apathetic. A lack of democratic traditions led few to believe that anything could be done to counter the government's transgressions and made people fearful of the consequences of attempting to do so. This resulted in the semi-paralysis of civic and political groups and provided the Meciar regime with relatively unchecked authority.

Program Rationale

An NDI delegation initially assessed Slovakia program possibilities in June 1993. After meeting with political party, NGO, and media representatives, the delegation concluded that the programmatic focus should be on civil society outside the capital Bratislava and that the program should concentrate on creating an indigenous community organizing capacity. NDI decided not to focus on political party building because the interlocutors in Slovakia stressed that the political scene was too tightly controlled by Meciar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and too dominated by Meciar's personal popularity. NDI did not believe that enough space existed for the effective use of limited development resources on political party building, at that time.

NDI selected a community organizing approach which would help foster politically active, and representative citizen groups that could engage in political processes and support democratic alternatives. This would thereby help advance and strengthen democratic participation and practices locally and could eventually be replicated on a wider scale.

NED-Funded Program Objectives and Activities (1994-1998)

Objectives

- C Sustainable community coalitions capable of public policy advocacy
- C Increased levels of informed citizen participation
- C Increased collaboration and advocacy through the formation of a country-wide network of NGOs
- C Creation of instructional materials to help promote organizing throughout Slovakia

Activities

NDI's first resident representative David Breg C a former political campaign worker in US elections and Congressional Research Service analyst C worked in Slovakia during late 1993 and the first half of 1994 to develop a plan for implementing a community organizing program. During this period, Breg traveled to nine different cities throughout Slovakia to identify a potential site for a program. Breg used a city-selection criteria developed by the earlier survey delegation. The criteria included:

- C A democratic mayor that is supportive of NDI's initiatives
- C Active associational life
- C Developed media outlets
- C Issues that are representative of other cities
- C Within three hours travel of Bratislava

Based on the criteria and his investigations, Breg recommended Trencin as the site of NDI's initial community organizing program. Trencin, a city of 60,000, is located 70 miles northeast of Bratislava. Breg wrote at the time that NDI would be able to help activists and concerned citizens work with local government to find solutions to their [common] problems. It is expected that this aspect of the project will take one year to develop before it reaches the point of replication.@

After Breg's assessment, NDI's second representative Jerry Morrison C a community organizer from Chicago, Illinois C arrived in Trencin in July 1994 and began conducting a community power analysis. This analysis and corresponding interviews with community leaders helped Morrison identify 35 existing organizations willing to join in an unprecedented coalition building process, in order to begin addressing community problems through collective action. Morrison provided a report on the process and outcomes of the power analysis and coalition building exercise.

In September 1994, at the first roundtable meeting of all the coalition representatives, the group chose to conduct a voter/candidate forum before the parliamentary elections later that month. In preparation for the forum, Morrison and select coalition members developed a how-to guide that governed the organization and execution of both the parliamentary election forum, and a follow-on local election forum. Approximately 250 citizens participated in the parliamentary forum. More than 200 citizens attended a follow-on forum before the November local elections. According to reports, members of the coalition

came away from the process energized and excited about future activities

Early in 1995, the coalition began a community organizing campaign after receiving training from Morrison and Tom Gaudette, a community organizing professional from Chicago.

During this time, Morrison was also training his Slovak assistant Brano Orgonik as an organizer.

The coalition developed and administered 2000 citizen surveys, in order to identify a practical issue to organize around. 800 surveys were completed and returned. From the surveys, the coalition identified six local policy issues for resolution. In early April 1995, the coalition held a townhall meeting with 150 citizens, the mayor and police chief. This activity was followed by additional citizen meetings with public officials. During this period, the coalition registered itself as the Trencin Informal Association (TNZ).

When Morrison departed in June 1995 after his one-year assignment concluded, Brano Orgonik took over the organizing role with the TNZ in Trencin. During the following four months, NDI did not have an expatriate representative in Slovakia. Brano Orgonik, however, continued to work with the coalition and consult with NDI.

In October 1995, NDI placed its third resident representative, Bill Wood, in Trencin to work with Orgonik and expand the program model to another city. In February 1996, an NDI delegation, led by Wood, assessed various sites for program expansion. Based on the team's report, NDI chose to expand the community organizing program to the eastern city of Presov based on the positive response of local officials and the absence of similar initiatives.

In Presov, Wood and Orgonik began conducting one-on-one meetings with NGO representatives. This led to a large open meeting with members from 50 different organizations from the Presov area. (These organizations included service providers, youth clubs, women's associations, human rights organizations, and environmental organizations.) Using Slovak examples from Trencin, Wood and Orgonik followed up the initial meeting with a series of consultations to help the organizations better understand the possibility and benefits of working together with other groups to resolve local issues.

In August 1996, NDI's fourth resident representative David Sip C a lawyer and community organizing professional from St. Paul, Minnesota C took over program responsibilities in Presov. At the same time, the TNZ began working autonomously from NDI. With Sip's guidance, the newly created Presov coalition began the process of issue identification by conducting citizen surveys in October 1996. This process closely modeled that used previously in Trencin.

In February 1997, the Presov coalition met to select issues based on the survey results. The coalition selected three cross-cutting issues: the eradication of graffiti from city landmarks; the placement of information signboards around the city; and monitoring the progress on the construction of a municipal swimming pool. The Presov coalition became registered under the name of the Presov Civic Forum (POF). POF began work on the issues in March 1997 by organizing a townhall meeting with Presov's mayor and other officials. Sip also began developing an instructional handbook on organizing and advocacy that provided Slovak examples drawn from Trencin and Presov.

In May 1997, coalition leaders from Presov and Trencin, along with NDI organizers and leaders working on a USAID program in Banska Bystrica, attended an NDI gathering of organizers and community leaders. This event was designed to help forge a nationwide network of activists who could benefit from each others experiences.

In July 1997, the POF secured municipal approval to use a large downtown wall for a graffiti mural. In this way, the coalition provides graffiti artists with a central, approved location to express themselves, thereby limiting defacement of public buildings.

In partnership with POF, NDI hired and organizer trainee C Rasto Mochnacky C to assume the role of organizer when Sip departed.

The second gathering of organizers and community leaders took place in November 1997.

Throughout 1997, Sip and other international NDI trainers worked with POF on internal, organizational development issues. In the first quarter of 1998, POF received some funding directly from the National Endowment for Democracy. David Sip departed in March 1998 at the conclusion of his 18-month assignment, and Rasto Mochnacky took over as the POF organizer. NDI continued to support POF financially and with periodic training through 1998.

Rasto Mochnacky resigned as a full-time organizer in the Spring for 1998, but continued to work part time to help train a replacement organizer. With NDI assistance, POF hired Martina Karnisova as the replacement organizer. NDI sent Patricia Garry, an organizing professional from Chicago, to work with Karnisova for two days in September 1998.

USAID-Funded Program Objectives and Activities (1996-1999)

Objectives

- C A cadre of 10 trained organizers
- C Active and independent community-based organizations
- C Institutionalized community organizing practices

Activities

In March 1996, after working three years with NED funds in Trencin and Presov, NDI expanded its community organizing work to central Slovakia using USAID funding. This decision was accompanied by a decision to train a cadre of organizers, rather than to create community coalitions. The program initially had one-year timetable that was subsequently expanded during the first year to a total of three years. Initially, NDI proposed to train 20 organizers during the first year, but then reduced that number to ten over the course of the program based on a recommendation from the newly-hired NDI resident representative

Chuck Hirt. Hirt had 30 years of experience with community-based advocacy and non-profit service organizations. He was also the founder and executive director of a non-profit organization in Cincinnati, Ohio.

NDI deployed Hirt to Slovakia in March 1996. Hirt and a small NDI delegation assessed four Slovak cities to determine the most appropriate location for a long-term organizing program. The delegation selected Banska Bystrica in central Slovakia.

During the second half of 1996, Hirt acclimated himself to Slovakia and began to conduct interviews and establish relationships with civic and government leaders. Through this process, Hirt identified three influential civic leaders to act as advisors to NDI's program. Hirt also worked on the issue of NDI's registration with the Slovak government.

In August 1996, Hirt hired five Slovak organizer trainees. These individuals would be trained to conduct community organizing activities and would work part-time. NDI sent the organizer trainees to Cincinnati and Chicago for two weeks in September 1996 to receive their formative training. The training program in Chicago was organized and implemented by the Citizen Information Service (CIS). After returning to Slovakia, the organizers began to apply their training in their assigned communities on a part-time basis. This work began with door-to-door surveys. All in all, more than a thousand initial surveys were completed by the organizers.

In November, Sister Barbara Busch, founder and director of the Cincinnati organization *Working in Neighborhoods*, joined Hirt in Slovakia to conduct a week of follow-on training.

During the first year of the program, nascent community organizations were formed in the Banska Bystrica neighborhood of Sasova and the Zvolen neighborhood of Zapad. In each case, a small cadre of leaders began to emerge and become active. Moreover, under the guidance of the organizers, the organizations began the process of identifying issues.

Lauren Coletta and Jim Field of CIS conducted training in Slovakia in April 1997.

In May 1997, the organizers and leaders participated in the regular gathering of organizers and community leaders, along with their counterparts from Trencin and Presov. The periodic gatherings were intended to strengthen a Slovak network of community organizing groups.

Of the first five part-time organizers hired, two were let go before the end of the first year for performance reasons. In August of 1997, NDI began expanding the program to additional cities. Along with the expansion, NDI decided to hire only full-time organizers so that the proper level of attention and time could be given to the organizing efforts.

In September 1997, the organization formed in the Zapad neighborhood of Zvolen completed a nine month campaign that resulted in the municipal council approving a 3.5 million Slovak Crown project to improve a blighted area. The 90-member group then began a campaign to deal with an abandoned building.

Hirt hired seven new organizers in November 1997 C five organizers for the expansion areas and two replacement organizers. During December 1997, the seven new organizers participated in a formative training program in Cincinnati and Chicago.

In February 1998, the group in the Sasova neighborhood of Banska Bystrica successfully finished a campaign that increased police patrols in the neighborhood. The group then began a campaign to determine the future of an abandoned building in the neighborhood.

Lauren Coletta and Jim Fields again traveled to Slovakia in April 1998 to conduct training. The regular gathering of organizers and leaders took place in October 1998 and provided the organizers with an opportunity to share experiences with their counterparts.

The organizers and newly-created community organizations participated in the OK 98 campaign by organizing candidate forums for the 1998 parliamentary elections. More than a hundred citizens attended each of the different forums.

During the second year, Hirt began regular staff meetings in order to promote more sharing of experiences and lessons learned.

Two second year organizers were let go and replaced in Zilina, a city two hours North of Banska Bystrica.

During 1998, NDI also began explicitly considering the need to sustain the organizing efforts and considered creating an umbrella organization to support and expand the practice of organizing. A plan for sustainability was submitted to USAID and NDI eventually received approval to use funds to create a Slovak organization.

During the third year of programming, NDI expanded the program to a rural area. A Romany organizer trainee was also hired to help access and activate marginalized groups.

In September 1999, the organization formed in the city of Nitra completed a one-year campaign to restore the crumbling balconies of a state-owned apartment complex. Through petitions, media outreach, and other tactics, the group of 80 citizens secured 3 million Slovak Crowns for the reconstruction.

Over the final 18 months of programming, NDI began working toward the creation of the Citizens Action Center as an independent Slovak organization that would support and promote community organizing. This included organizational development and fundraising training. The group also established a board of directors, and a management and staff structures.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

To improve citizen participation program initiatives and inform decisions about when community organizing approaches may be practical, NDI tasked a three-member team with qualitatively evaluating NDI's community organizing programs in Slovakia.

NDI is committed to improving program performance and institutional learning through monitoring and evaluation. By determining results and illuminating lessons learned, monitoring and evaluation ensures better quality programs now and in the future. NDI uses final program evaluations to measure overall results and impact. The information generated through these evaluation activities is used to help inform decisionmaking about future programming and maintain institutional memory.

The evaluation team comprised Sanford Horwitt, Boris Strecansky, and Aaron Azelton. Horwitt works to promote citizen participation in the United States and is a 20-year scholar of community organizing. Strecansky is a long-time civic activist in Slovakia who currently directs a USAID-funded grant-giving program called Your Land. Azelton has organized and conducted citizen participation programs at NDI for more than seven years. (See Appendix 4 for biographies)

The team brought complementary perspectives to bear on the evaluation process. Strecansky brought knowledge of Slovak civil society's organization and development. Horwitt came with knowledge of the history and art of community organizing in the United States. Azelton provided comparative knowledge of citizen participation programs and a familiarity with the difficulties faced by NDI's resident representatives operating in challenging environments abroad with limited resources, based on his assignments in Bosnia and West Bank and Gaza. The three perspectives reflected NDI's acknowledgment that the quality and impact of the community organizing work had to be evaluated in the context of Slovakia's partial democratic transition.

With the guidance of several NDI staff members, the evaluation team developed three specific evaluation objectives.

- C Determine whether the programs achieved any or all of the stated objectives.
- C Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the community organizing approaches (what worked and what did not).
- C Examine and interpret the overall impact of the programs (sustained changes to individual and institutional understanding and behavior).

The evaluation team used an initial document review and discussions with present and past NDI staff members to determine the community organizing programs' rationale, objectives, activities, and reported outcomes.⁴ Over the course of six years, NDI had reported extensively on the Slovakia programs and recorded quantitative and qualitative indicators of activity and impact. For instance, NDI tracked the number of participants attending candidate forums, the number of community surveys conducted, the

⁴ The team reviewed program proposals, quarterly reports, bi-weekly reports, final reports, and other programmatic correspondence.

number of community organizing actions, the increases in citizens participating, and the degree of media coverage.

To supplement these records and broaden the examination of results and impact, the evaluation team members developed a list of questions that guided their investigation.

- C Is collective action now recognized as a problem-solving tool in communities where NDI has worked?
- C Is there a common understanding of community organizing among program participants?
- C Have there been successful organizing campaigns? In what way?
- C Are there new organizations? How strong are they?
- C Is there a network of community organizing groups?
- C Have materials been created and distributed around the country? Are they being used?
- C Are the organizers well-trained and capable of working independently of NDI?
- C Are the leaders recognized in their communities and are they playing effective roles in community actions?
- C What has changed in terms of participation and power relations in communities?
- C Are the results and impacts consistent with initial expectations?

To answer each of these types of questions, the evaluation team also had to formulate questions that could be used to probe more deeply during unstructured, key informant interviews and roundtable discussions. For instance, to find out if the organizers are well-trained and capable of working independently of NDI, the evaluation team asked interviewees (including the organizers themselves and others) about the organizers' job descriptions, the training they received, the work they are doing, the effect of the work on the respective community, etc.

The team held key informant interviews and roundtable discussions in Slovakia from October 10 through October 18, 1999. (See Appendix 5 for list of interviewees) With the assistance of NDI staff members, the team identified primary sources of information. These included select community organizing program participants, program staff members, trainers, donor representatives, Slovak civic and political leaders, and representatives of other international organizations. In Slovakia, the team members conducted the interviews and discussions with the assistance of professional translation. (Mr. Strecansky, however, is a native Slovak speaker.)

During the interviews and discussion, the team did not always ask the same questions. There was no question 1, question 2, question 3, etc. Instead, the team used an unstructured approach that began with open-ended questions and continued with a select series of probing questions, determined by prior responses. The team was able to ask all of the questions, however. The approach had a conversational character and gave the team latitude to follow different threads of the conversation more deeply than others.

Throughout the process, the team looked for corroborating evidence by asking various sources about

similar aspects of the programs. For instance, to determine the effectiveness of the organizers in the Banska Bystrica program, the team talked with the organizers themselves, trainers, NDI resident representatives, community leaders, and NDI's donors. The team then weighed the impressions of all the respondents against each other and against NDI's intended results.

The overall approach had several limitations, the most significant of which were the minimal amount of time available for the team to observe citizen activities in Slovakia and the limited number of discussions with "average" Slovak citizens. The limitations also prevented the team from comparing behaviors between citizens inside and outside of the program, and from finding out what various program participants may now be doing with the knowledge and skills acquired during their participation. A more comprehensive evaluation might have included time to actually observe NDI's civic partners, the organizers, and the community leaders in action. Moreover, the evaluation would have benefitted from discussions with a broader sampling of citizens and informed observers who reside inside and outside the areas where programming occurred.

The evaluation team hopes that this qualitative evaluation will be considered in conjunction with previous quantitative measures of program impact. These measures indicated a significant level of citizen involvement in different program activities (e.g., 800 citizen surveys returned in Trencin in 1995, 50 organizations involved in inaugural meeting of POF in 1997, an average of more than 100 citizens attending NDI-organized candidate forums in 1998, 90 citizens involved in Nitra advocacy campaign in 1999).

The October trip schedule did not permit the evaluation team to interview citizen-leaders of the newly-created community organizations, conduct in-depth examination of at least one of the organizations, or to hold interviews with journalists, or political leaders who could have brought a different perspective. In addition, the team did not talk with average citizens outside of the program, which might have provided a 'control' to the evaluation. Nonetheless, based on the information available, a clear enough picture emerges of what has and has not been achieved, as well as some insights into the reasons for the results.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NDI's decision to implement a community organizing project in Slovakia was based on the recommendations of NDI staff members that visited the country in 1993. As stated in the assessment report: "The team concluded that the program should concentrate on creating an indigenous community organizing model. This conclusion was based on the assumption that Slovaks are more likely to participate in the political process locally because of their distrust of national politics and inexperience in democratic political participation and because of pressing local economic and social issues." Equally important, NDI also assumed that a US-style community organizing project could work in Slovakia (i.e., the organizing concept and methodology were appropriate). Were these valid assumptions? The evaluation team believes the answer is almost certainly yes, notwithstanding the findings that the implementation has fallen short of expectations in some ways.

Widespread passivity and resignation characterized Slovakia in 1993. However, passivity, apathy, resignation, or a sense of inefficacy are typical feelings among many, if not most, politically disadvantaged or repressed people. Community organizing is a means of overcoming these feelings by empowering people. Community organizers help ordinary people discover that they have the right and the ability to influence the political decision-making process and that, to a significant extent, they can shape (if the governing environment is somewhat responsive) their destiny by working together on common concerns.

If Slovakia had been absolutely closed and intolerant of organized citizen challenges to public policy (as it had been for 45 years prior to the program), a significant barrier would have existed to successful implementation, and it would not have been advisable to embark on such a program. Although Slovakia struggled with a variety of democratic development issues in the mid-1990s, it seems that a sufficient degree of political freedom existed locally for community organizing initiatives to succeed. Any concerns that citizens had about political reprisals or physical attacks for challenging the status quo (and there were some such concerns) did not preclude their involvement in organizing activities.

To be sure, basic democratic concepts of citizen participation and pluralism were not widely understood, and certainly not applied in Slovakia. The tradition of top down decisionmaking pervaded most institutions and organizations. Moreover, there existed a customary aversion to confrontation. Several people interviewed during the evaluation observed that the concept of a community@itself was, and still is, unfamiliar to most people. Also, there was a relatively weak network of voluntary, membership organizations. Classic models of community organization involve creating an organization of organizations (i.e., the community organizer knits together the existing fraternal, service, civic, and religious groups in a geographical area and creates a larger, more influential organization capable of affecting change). But if the constituent parts are nonexistent or weak, then the organizer's job is more difficult, perhaps much more difficult when the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship are not understood either. For all of these reasons, organizing democratic, mass-based community organizations and training a cadre of organizers in Slovakia would be a formidable undertaking for the most seasoned senior community organizer.

The evaluation team found, in retrospect, that a prime barrier to more successful community organizing work in Slovakia was NDI's lack of understanding at the outset about the time necessary to reasonably see results in this environment and also about the experience required to effectively execute the programs. The setting of short-term time horizons necessitated by NDI's funding environment pushed the program implementors to look for quick demonstrable results at the expense of some foundation-laying that might have paid off in the longer-term.

NED-Funded Program

After NDI selected Trencin as the site of the first community organizing project, Jerry Morrison agreed to be NDI's representative. Morrison had some community organizing experience and training in Chicago and, by all accounts, was talented and energetic. But, his previous community organizing work had been conducted under supervision.

When Morrison arrived in Trencin in July 1994, he was suddenly on his own. Not only that, but, as he recalled years later (during an October 1999 interview), he didn't have much to start with: "no translator, no contacts, no nothing." Moreover, Morrison knew that he would be in Trencin for only a year according to the contractual arrangement with NDI. He believed that NDI wanted "tangible, concrete results in a short period of time." At the same time, NDI expected that such short-term results could be achieved and that they would also strengthen collective citizen participation in the long-term. The process of organizing that Morrison had learned in Chicago, however, was nothing if not methodical, and it suggested to Morrison that there was not a feasible timetable in Slovakia. Although there are exceptions to the rule, generally the first year (and sometimes longer) is devoted to one-on-one sessions with community residents and small group meetings where relationships are slowly developed. The organizer begins to identify informal leaders and potential leaders, and trains them to conduct still more one-on-ones, all the while educating them about democratic concepts and practices. For example, the emerging leaders would be tutored formally (training and consultation) and informally (practice and reflection) about citizen participation, government accountability, and collective decisionmaking. Eventually, committees may be formed to research, study, and discuss issues that have emerged in interviews and group meetings. But, generally there is little likelihood of public action during the first year. If a community organizer followed this approach in a city the size of Trencin, it might take a year or more before the establishment of an official steering committee and the election of temporary leaders.

But in Trencin, Morrison took a different course by identifying, in a matter of weeks, potential NGO leaders, quickly forming an organization around them, and moving to action in just a few months. The resulting action was a successful, high-visibility candidate forum prior to the 1994 parliamentary elections. The Trencin-group held a similar, follow-on forum for local elections a month later. Again, Morrison says that this was the kind of activity that he understood NDI wanted. "NDI wanted community organizing experiences, but they also wanted political participation experiences," he said when interviewed. Indeed, at the NED, Program Officer Roger Potocki recalled in an October 1999 interview that he and his colleagues thought that high-profile political and electoral participation were the real priorities in 1994, rather than grassroots organizing. Even later Potocki recalls that he and his colleagues were not impressed by the

hundreds of citizen surveys collected by Morrison's group C that became the TNZ C in which residents prioritized the issues that were most important to them.

The 1994 candidate forums were quite significant, however, in that they marked the first such forums in Slovakia. They also demonstrated that a loose organization of civic representatives could take the initiative in compelling political candidates to answer ordinary citizens' questions. And, the TNZ leaders apparently learned much about organizing a political event, negotiating with candidates, and generating interest among their fellow citizens. In an October 1999 interview, Potocki, who had been a skeptic about the importance of the original community organizing program, said that the early work in Trencin had a carryover effect in the OK 98 Campaign. Based on his 1999 visit to Slovakia, he suggested that "it became clear that you needed local people to carry out the nitty-gritty of the campaign. NDI-trained people were important."

Was Morrison's perception accurate that NDI sought short-term political results? The answer appears to be yes. NDI's institutional experience at the time suggested that short-term programs often could have substantial impact. Also, because the program was funded by the NED, whose grants are generally more modest and shorter in duration than those of USAID, NDI was obliged to articulate envisioned results that could be seen sooner rather than later. These considerations do not necessarily mean that NDI made tradeoffs between the short-term and long-term. NDI's limited understanding about community organizing, as well as a desire to have an impact on the unfolding political events (e.g., parliamentary and local elections only months after Morrison arrived), led NDI to push for short-term results in anticipation that they would foster long-term advances. Unfortunately, it now appears that a focus on short-term results might have mitigated the chances for certain long-term gains. Although NDI's approach supported temporary participation C in the form of candidate forums C and allowed the coalition to develop event organizing abilities, it did not help the group build solid foundations for continuous citizen participation. In a report from January 1995, Morrison writes: "the Trencin experience has indicated that it is possible for a young organization to venture into the political realm, but not without paying the price of slowed organizational development." Over time, it seems that the TNZ actually sacrificed the building of a strong, mass-based organizational foundation, in favor of the short-term impact. To have achieved a higher, more sustained level of participation, the TNZ probably would have had to spend more time on relationship building with citizens, development of citizen skills, and then empowering citizens through other forms of collective participation. Because this did not happen in a deliberate manner, the TNZ has not institutionalized community organizing practices. When visiting the organization in October 1999, the evaluation team did not find evidence that the group is working continuously to expand and strengthen direct citizen involvement in public policymaking. Instead, they seem to be continuing the activities perfected in 1994.

In a 1995 NDI proposal to the NED there is some confusion evident between the characteristics of a loose NGO coalition C like Morrison had organized C and a genuine, mass-based membership organization. "Town meetings . . . surveys, and other forms of contact will ensure that the coalition has the pulse of residents on what issues to advance, and on how to resolve them." This observation implies that ordinary citizens may be heard, but perhaps not fully engaged in the democratic process. In effect, the use of opinion surveys is a short-cut substitute for the painstaking process of conducting one-on-one interviews

and small group meetings. Without a growing network of relationships and genuinely engaged, inspired, knowledgeable citizens, it is impossible to build a strong, representative community organization. In a 1999 written assessment of the programs, Lauren Coletta, a senior organizing professional and regular NDI trainer, said that she would not recommend a survey model. "You can not assess potential leaders that you meet with a survey," she said. "Leaders and organizers miss out on a lot when they are tallying surveys rather than talking to people. I think surveys should be used as a tactic, not as a means of serious organizational outreach."

Very little real community organizing happened in Trencin. In retrospect, Morrison says that it would have been "much better if I had been able to make a two-year commitment." Unfortunately, due to the one-year duration of funding and NDI's undeveloped understanding of community organizing, Morrison's position was never considered long-term. For the same reasons, NDI was slow to replace Morrison after he finished his one-year assignment; there was a gap of four months before Bill Wood arrived to replace Morrison and support the work of the freshman Slovak organizer Brano Orgonik.

The evaluation team believes that, in addition to the continuous presence of a long-term organizer, chances for a more successful community organizing project might also be increased under the direction of a more senior organizer. (Although it is only speculative, a more seasoned, confident organizer might be better able to sustain a focus on long-term community organizing goals, while addressing short-term opportunities occasioned by elections.)

Today, the Trencin coalition survives, but it has a modest membership and is struggling to make it financially. In October 1999, the executive director was in the process of leaving, because the organization did not have funds to sustain his position full-time. Although they received international funding for their role in the OK 98 Campaign, the TNZ does not appear to have an established fundraising program between elections.

NDI apparently overlooked the fact that very little community organizing had occurred in Trencin when the institute expanded the "community organizing" program to Presov. A 1996 NDI proposal to the NED stated that a new "field representative will provide instruction in how to form a community organizing group akin to the Trencin coalition." Yet, at this same time, the group in Trencin was loosely organized and without a strong commitment to broad-based citizen participation. Not surprisingly, in Presov, the field representative (who never really had the opportunity to apply his full complement of organizing talents) replicated, to a considerable extent, the most visible accomplishments of the Trencin coalition (i.e., administering opinion surveys, holding townhall meetings, and sponsoring candidate forums). Although the evaluation team's October 1999 visit to Presov was short, the team found that the POF shares many of the same characteristics as the TNZ: little membership except for a modest corps of NGO representatives who form a steering committee but are more focused on their own organizations; no long-term plans; and no developed fundraising strategy. The groups appear to have abandoned serious grass roots organizing, and instead focuses on generating public discussions of issues and publicizing the results of opinion surveys. Group members suggested that they might like to hold public officials accountable for their policies (and misdeeds), but without a mass membership base and little money their influence is not likely to be great.

David Sip, NDI's former representative in Presov wrote in 1998 that if there is only a one-year time-frame, then a resident representative is faced with a choice: "the choice is try to only do some community organizing, do it well, and hope it sticks after one year, or begin with organizing and move into developing a stand-alone organization, and again hope that it sticks after one year." David then quipped, "Not much of a choice is it? What we are trying to accomplish, could not always be accomplished in three years in the United States." This suggests that there is a problem with not recognizing that grassroots organizing is necessarily longer-term and, moreover, simply developing an organization quickly will not lead to the sustained practice of broad-based organizing and activism. If NDI had set out simply to foster the creation of local NGOs with indeterminate or flexible citizen participation missions, then the program could be characterized today as entirely successful. In that case, the measure of success would be the existence and sustainability of these NGOs. NDI, however, intended to create organizations capable of fostering and sustaining citizen participation in public policy making (organizations that work to involve ever-increasing numbers of citizens in the policy making process). This, it would seem, requires a longer and more systematic approach, in which success is measured by the quantity and quality of participation.

USAID-Funded Program

As stated in an NDI quarterly report, "In the spring of 1996, a long-term community organizing project was started with funding provided by the USAID. The intent of this project is to train Slovak citizens to be community organizers ..." In February 1998, NDI responded to USAID questions about the anticipated results of this program by stating that they would include:

"Ten community organizers will be sufficiently trained under the program, such that they have a capacity to conduct advocacy initiatives without direct NDI involvement, and to train others... NDI sees sustainability of community organizing in Slovakia as fundamentally grounded in organization development. Accordingly, NDI defines sustainability along institutional lines (i.e., the community organizations fostered under this program are politically, organizationally, and financially sustainable). The ten community organizations formed under the program should have the ability to foster similar organizations after NDI's departure."

This articulation reflects that NDI had begun to learn and, in turn, apply many lessons from previous community organizing work in Slovakia. This learning continued during the USAID program. For example, during the first year, NDI recognized that part-time organizers were not as effective as those willing to make a full-time commitment. As a result, NDI began to recruit and train only full-time organizers. A pattern of learning-by-doing helped the program slowly evolve. Yet, while organizers were trained and organizations formed, a self-perpetuating Slovak process has not fully emerged.

Training Organizers

As a terms of reference for the analysis of the organizers= skills and understanding, the evaluation team used past program reports that outlined NDI=s training targets. These reports indicated, for instance, that three-year organizers would be capable of working independently to create sustainable community organizations (i.e., organizations with growing memberships, emerging leaders, and financial resources). The reports also suggested that two-year organizers would understand and be skilled in strategic planning, fundraising, communications through brochures and leaflets, meeting management, accounting issues, public relations, volunteer recruitment, researching issues, leadership development, and working with other organizations.

Of the first five organizer trainees from Banska Bystrica, Zvolen and Lucenec in 1996, only one remained as an organizer in October 1999. The other remaining nine organizers in the program (five with two or more years of experience) possess some important organizing skills, but they do not seem to be as strong as would be expected after two years of training and work. Through discussion with the organizers, the team determined that C while NDI had successfully introduced many of the skills C most organizers did not seem to have yet internalized and integrated the range of skills systematically in their organizing. To a degree, this may be a factor of insufficient past democratic experiences in Slovakia and the consequent amount of time needed to change underlying norms and alter conventional behavior (on the part of the organizers themselves and within the communities where they work). At the same time, however, changes to some aspects of the program might have led to more positive results.

C The absence of a Slovakia-based, highly-experienced, senior community organizer

It is not possible to train raw recruits to be effective community organizers without a coach who is a master organizer. For all of his talents and experiences, former NDI representative Chuck Hirt readily stated that he does not have a strong community organizing background. And because he does not, he had to supplement the education of the organizers in two ways. First, to learn from more experienced organizers and see organizing in action, NDI sponsored two-week trips for the Slovak organizers to Cincinnati and Chicago. Second, at Hirt's invitation, a group of trainers from the United States made repeated visits to Slovakia to consult and lead workshops for a week or so at a time. Although there is value in exposing the trainees to other professional experiences and formal training, these supplements cannot make up for the lack of a senior organizer in Slovakia interacting regularly with new organizers. Ideally, the senior organizer would be constantly observing the work of new organizers and developing a critically important mentoring relationship.

The role of the organizer is high-skill and demanding. Training materials used by NDI in Slovakia indicate that an organizer is an agitator, reflector, strategic planner, tactician, teacher, and professional. The education of an effective organizer requires a highly experienced mentor. Without such a person, it is unlikely that new organizers in an emerging democracy will be able to internalize the appropriate skills and values. It is important to keep in mind that the development of organizers in this context will likely require also changing customary preferences for closed decisionmaking and non-participation, for instance, that characterized Slovak society. Ongoing coaching is essential to ensure that professional, democratic organizing practices and behaviors become the norm. It also helps organizer trainees identify and

overcome ever-emerging challenges associated with the different stages of the organizing process.

Overall, the program may also have suffered from the fact that Hirt was forced to wear many hats as NDI's representative. For example, during the early part of the program, Hirt spent considerable time focusing on the issue of NDI's registration with the Slovak government. These additional responsibilities may have prevented him from observing and reviewing the work of the organizer trainees constantly. As a result, the feedback loop between teacher and student was not continuous.

C Brief trips to Chicago for supplemental training that were not efficient

One-week or even two-week trips to discuss and observe community organization in the United States will not yield very much (particularly when there is no common frame of reference among the newly-recruited participants). This may be analogous to learning to speak a foreign language. When visiting a country for a week or two it is difficult to learn much, but when the stay lasts for six months, it becomes possible to learn much more. The trainees probably would have benefitted from learning more about the form and function of organizing before visiting the United States. As suggested by some Slovak organizers, USAID officials, and other Slovak civic leaders, this may also have helped prevent additional program costs associated with organizers quitting or being let go after receiving a pricy trip abroad at the outset of the program.

C The high turnover and low level of motivation among organizers

Although there is no perfect profile for a promising recruit, an interest in politics, broadly defined, or political experiences in a campaign or with an NGO would seem to be relevant. After three years of organizing practice, Kayo Zboril, the NDI-trained organizer in Zvolen, also suggested that a new recruit should have at least some experience with civic or political activism. In a country like Slovakia, a young man or woman who was a leader in the student protests a decade ago might possess the passion for democratic social change and the courage to act on those passions. A prospective organizer should be curious, interested in political and social ideas, and a pluralist. He or she should have personal qualities that can inspire others to join in a collective effort to change the status quo. Few prospects will have all of these experiences or qualities, but they ought to have at least a few.

Based on interviews with the current organizers, it does not appear that they have backgrounds or interests clearly related to politics or organizing. One organizer trainee ran a tearoom, another taught at a vocational school, another had been selling cosmetics, and so on. When interviewed in October 1999, two of the organizers in fact said they would go back to their old careers if it were possible and affordable.

Since few appear to have strong backgrounds in politics or public policy, part of their training should have included select readings and group discussion of historical and contemporary works to stimulate their thinking about political power and social change. This group study might also have provided a stronger sense of shared experience than currently exists. When asked by the evaluation team members, most of the organizers expressed different understandings about the purpose and process of organizing, although

they have worked as part of the same overall effort for several years. They also had different visions about the direction in which their collective work is and should be going. At the same time, a number of organizers said that they did not find the biweekly meeting of organizers very enlightening, and none of the current organizers say that they are regular or even occasional readers of anything beyond a newspaper.

As of October 1999, none of the organizers in the Banska Bystrica program seemed to possess the professional capacity to work independently or train others in the art of organizing. While the Citizen Action Center in Banska Bystrica is intended to support and expand community organizing practices in Slovakia, it will first have to concentrate on strengthening the capacity of the current organizers.

Development of Community Organizations and Citizen Leaders

The schedule did not permit the evaluation team to interview citizen-leaders (with one exception). Apart from one meeting involving members of a community organization and public officials, the schedule also did not provide an opportunity to observe the community organizations in action. Therefore, the team's impressions about the development of the community organizations and leaders are based principally on interviews with the organizers, Chuck Hirt, USAID officials in Slovakia, and a few other civic activists.

Since the training and retention of community organizers has been problematic, it should not be surprising to discover that progress thus far in developing organizations and leaders has been modest. In three places where organizers have been working for at least two years C a rural area around Litava, the Sasova neighborhood in Banska Bystrica and the Zapad neighborhood in Zvolen C there is little evidence of significant growth, either in the number of citizens actively involved or in organizational development. At the same time, however, in each of these geographic areas there has been organizing activity that contributed to bringing about a measure of change. In the Zvolen neighborhood, for example, the Citizen's Initiative played a role in persuading public officials to build sidewalks and make other improvements in a blighted area. But this victory does not appear to have been followed by organizational growth, either in the form of membership development or the development of stronger organizational leaders and structures. An NGO activist in the Sasova neighborhood informed the evaluation team that NDI's program helped create citizen leaders who became active during a 1998 campaign to rehabilitate an abandoned building. However, when asked what these leaders have done recently, the NGO activist responded by saying, "I do not know of any recent initiatives." In an interview with Chuck Hirt, he confirmed impressions by saying that in Sasova there has not been any development of new leaders in the last two years. While he was hopeful that the Zvolen Citizen's Initiative "will set up a real membership base," its size and structure remain undeveloped at this point. Given the Slovakia context, this may not be surprising, in that more time might be needed to overcome conventional norms and practices contrary to broad-based citizen participation. However, the Zvolen organizer had knocked on hundreds of doors and contacted scores of citizens as part of the initial organizing process (noteworthy activities in themselves). The organizer also succeeded in helping the Zvolen group come together to conduct a winning campaign in 1997. It seems that these activities would have provided great opportunities for the development and the expansion of the Zvolen organization. But since 1997, there seems to have been very little movement on expanding the

organizations leadership or membership, and there seems to have been no movement on developing new organizers. Even regular democratic elections within the different community organizations formed by NDI does not yet appear to be commonplace.

At the USAID office in Bratislava, Kathy Stermer said that she had "hoped for a network of community organizations but that hasn't happened yet." And her colleague, the Slovak project advisor Gustav Matijek added: "Basically, the community organizers have not been able to reach out and mobilize enough people."

At the same time, the USAID representatives noted the roles that NDI trained organizers played in organizing and involving citizens in candidate forums in Banska Bystrica, Litava, Lucenec, Nitra, and Zvolen. Ms. Stermer suggested that overall the "sustainability of community initiatives [was] placed secondary to creating a cadre of organizers."

In practice, however, the two goals of organizer development and organization development are linked. The most important part of the education of an organizer-in-training is to learn from first-hand experience how to initiate, expand and sustain a community organizations. Each phase brings a new set of challenges. Moreover, as community organizations are developed and strengthened, they should be among the best sources of recruiting would-be community organizers. Indeed, from the outset, a community organizer should be looking for local residents who can be trained to take on some of the responsibilities of launching a new organization. In every effective community organization, there is likely to be one or more citizen-leader who emerges with the skills, interest and motivation to become a full-time organizer. During the last three years, however, it is not clear that the identification of such citizen-leaders has been a high priority.

At this point, the evaluation team wants to say again that the program helped bring about some positive developments. Many lessons were learned over the program period, without overly negative long-term consequences. Keep in mind that the program had an experimental dimension and that adjustments had to be made during the course of the three years. Overall, the program and the people involved came a long way. Without a doubt, the lives of the organizers, leaders, and communities have changed for the better. People have developed some valuable democratic skills and values that they will continue to apply and impart. Moreover, the important practices of organizing and citizen activism has been introduced and will likely continue to gain strength with the support of Citizen Action Center in Banska Bystrica.

Recommendations for Future Community Organizing Work

- C NDI as an organization needs to develop further a common definition of community organizing and ensure that program staff members understand it in terms of its purpose, process, and outcomes. There also needs to be a clear understanding of how a major organizing project can complement rather than compete with other development activities and goals, such as electoral participation.
- C Because of the multi-year nature of community organizing, NDI might want to approach donors that are willing and able to commit funds for the entire program period.

- C Future community organizing programs should include a more rigorous mid-term assessment, in order to estimate program progress and make any necessary adjustment.
- C It is essential to recruit a highly experienced, effective community organizer that can make a long-term commitment.
- C New organizer trainees should have some experience or at least a strong interest in politics and participation. They should also be willing and able to make a full-time commitment to the project.
- C Sending organizer trainees to the United States for short-term training will be more effective later in a program, when the trainees have demonstrated a commitment, gained some actual experience, and developed a better contextual understanding. For these reason and the high cost, training in the United States should not be used for formative purposes.
- C As a cost-effective democratic development approach, community organizing is more appropriate in heavily populated, politically pivotal urban areas rather than in rural locales. Although rural populations would certainly benefit from the organizing process, the program impact will not be as broad and the chances of replication and expansion are limited.
- C Training organizers in emerging democracies also means training democrats. Without a democratic tradition, new organizers not only required help developing a complement of organizing skills, but also the underlying democratic values. In many ways, this requires the trainees to make a 180-degree turn away from closed, autocratic forms of political and social organization. Although training organizers and democrats is a congruous process, the time it takes cannot be underestimated.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1
Comments from Former NDI Central and East European
Regional Director Susan Atwood

COMMENTS ON THE SLOVAKIA COMMUNITY ORGANIZING EVALUATION REPORT

By Susan J. Atwood

First of all, I should say that the evaluation report was excellent. Very thorough and very balanced. I would differ hardly at all from the conclusions of the evaluation team and concur that a mid-term evaluation of this nature would have been immensely helpful in addressing some of the built-in weaknesses of the program. I also agree that some very real results were achieved and a great deal learned.

I would like to share some thoughts about the compatibility of NDI and community organizing in an overview and then comment very briefly on some of the points raised in the report in terms of adding background/insight that came from directing this challenging program over the course of the three years. (I would not necessarily expect these thoughts to be incorporated into the evaluation report but believe they are useful for consideration in future programs of this nature.)

OVERVIEW

In reviewing the program by reading the evaluation report, I was struck by the immensity of the task that NDI had undertaken in launching a community organizing program. I would completely agree that, at its onset, NDI lacked the institutional capacity to provide direction to the field representatives. The design of the NED program was initially done by a team that never envisaged a community organizing program (I do not know if anyone reviewed the original proposal). Initially, it was an NGO development program to be run simultaneously in the Czech Republic and Slovakia to allow comparisons to be drawn. Our first two representatives, David Breg and Kathy Toomey, were not recruited as community organizers. They were stationed in Bratislava and Prague respectively and, with the help of an initial survey team, including among others, Pat Griffin, recommended an approach that ended up being labeled community organizing (without anyone really being sure exactly what that implied) that should be conducted in up to three sites in the course of the program.

Kathy and David were primarily responsible for choosing the first sites for the program. As neither of them were community organizers, the criteria that we developed with them were most likely not the most pertinent (for instance both sites were relatively prosperous cities, near the capital of the country and with no history of any type of community activism, although a few existing NGOs (e.g., these were not sites where environmental activists had protested against dams, power plants, etc.).

Both David and Kathy were somewhat depressed during the time they spent in country. For one thing, they were alone, as CEE field representatives tend to be. But as they moved out of the capital city to the provincial areas, their isolation grew and the number of English speaking individuals shrunk. This was a problem that recurred with every single representative on these two programs. It was compounded by the fact that neither they nor the Washington DC-based staff were sure about how and when the program would end and there was constant uncertainty about funding. Despite the herculean efforts to read everything we could lay our hands on in terms of Alinsky type organizing and the very real commitment and enthusiasm for the program among the

CEE Washington DC-based team, none of us felt very sure of how to proceed.

The NED had initially opposed funding these programs and continued to fight with NDI as every new request for funding was submitted. The pressure for quick results from the NED (and therefore NDI) was in direct contradiction to everything that we were beginning to hear from community organizers, such as Jerry Morrison.

It became a mantra early on that this type of community organizing takes up to three years to take root in a community in the US -- what was the correct multiplier in a country (Slovakia) with no history of dissent (unlike Poland for instance) or citizen participation, where the issues were foreign to the organizers who did not even speak the language of the country? These were the pressures that lasted throughout the NED funded program.

Jerry Morrison is right that NDI wanted quick results -- otherwise funding would have ended in any case. I would maintain in retrospect (and thus strengthen the conclusion of the evaluation team) that it is NOT POSSIBLE to run an effective community organizing program under the short term funding arrangements of the NED and the expectations of their staff for quick results. (The AID program I will come to below. The design of the AID program was changed to a three-year one as a direct result of the lessons learned on the NED program.)

By the time that we designed the AID program, we had decided that, rather than working with leaders of existing organizations, NDI should recruit and train its own cadre of organizers to maximize sustainability. Still, the original AID proposal was way too ambitious in its scope of how many organizers to train in a one-year period. This was subsequently amended on the professional advice of Morrison and Chuck Hirt who both told us the program could not work. However, NDI relations with AID Slovakia were bruised by the decision to downsize. Moreover, AID continued to press throughout the program for a greater impact than we were able to demonstrate in the given timeframes. It was also difficult for NDI staff to adequately convey the program to AID given the lack of institutional knowledge so there were meetings that led to confusion and, subsequently, considerable work to clarify and resubmit written modifications to the program. None of our field representatives were experienced in dealing with AID and, in some cases, the tendency of a community organizer to challenge authority, led to added tensions. However, after great diplomatic efforts and good will on all sides, I believe that our relations with AID Slovakia remained fairly good -- this was certainly helped by the success of our election related program and Lisa Mclean's experience with AID.

The ongoing involvement of Loren Coletta and Jim Field in the program was an excellent component. They advised both NDI and the Slovak organizers and their commitment gained them the trust and respect of all those involved in the program. However, for this project the real need was to have had someone with their background on the NDI DC staff.

Recruitment of organizers was also a problem. In retrospect, I believe that a committee should have been formed to interview candidates, rather than the decision being left to an individual field representative. However, in other cases -- Civic Forum in Bosnia for example -- the NDI field representatives have done an excellent job of recruiting with little oversight, other than criteria definition, from DC. In Slovakia, very few individuals with pre-existing political experience were identified -- most of these type of individuals either had existing jobs in NGOs which had more long term stability or did not live in the communities where we chose to work. Again, this point supports the evaluation conclusion that basing these programs in significant urban areas may be preferable. Many of those recruited became concerned about on going funding from NDI and left for

other opportunities with more job security. Some just found it too hard and had little or no support from their families for their work that, unusually for Slovaks, included significant evening and weekend work.

Trying to have one field representative mentor and train 10 different organizers from scratch in so many different communities is an immensely difficult mandate. The difficulty of travel, plus the time that Hirt had to spend on Slovak bureaucracy, compounded the problem. As for DC, we had a very hard time keeping track of the different individuals and the different program initiatives in the various sites -- as did AID. In Civic Forum programs, in Bosnia for instance, all local NDI staff members resided in the same geographical area (albeit much travel was still required) and real team work emerged among the staff. It seems that the Slovak organizers barely knew each other, at least not in the sense of working on projects together. In the States a community organizer resides in the community in which he/she operates and knows it intimately. This was not the case in Slovakia.

Again, the pressure for results forced NDI to expand the project in year two from central Slovakia to western Slovakia while also expecting Hirt to keep an eye on the Presov coalition. As a result, very few of the organizers had sustained on going training for more than one year of the three-year program. Ten organizers in one area would have been challenging, having them in two areas made it overwhelming. Despite this, some of the organizers did achieve impressive results, but did not learn how to sustain energy and momentum.

Unlike Civic Forum, we did not provide the organizers with a systematic 'education' on community organizing, but simply asked them to do it. This was a big mistake. Civic Forum has evolved in Bosnia so that the education phase and the organizing phase are no longer artificially separated but take place simultaneously. This is the model to follow. I believe that the community organizing conducted under the Civic Forum program, at least in Bosnia, has proven its worth and fits the NDI approach. Perhaps it is not pure community organizing (I have forgotten some of my Alinsky lessons), but I think the mixture of NDI experience with previous civic programs (Azelton), community organizing (David Sip) and civic education (Ken Hashimoto) in Bosnia worked extremely effectively. Of course, in Bosnia we had long-term funding and three representatives in three sites over three years and a more evolved approach to sustainability, partly as a result of lessons from Slovakia.

So, in conclusion (and I will comment on the report briefly section by section below), NDI should only engage in community organizing in countries where long term funding is available and mix education with organizing from the start. Sustainability (or NOT -- by which I mean that I do not believe that sustainability can or should always be part of every program but that we should be clear from the outset to our domestic partners whether or not we are in a position to help in this regard) should be part of the thinking of the original proposal, mid term evaluations should be conducted and NDI functional teams should continue to strengthen NDI's institutional knowledge of community organizing as part of its civic portfolio.

The CEE team and now, with the evaluation, NDI has learned a great deal from the Slovakia program and -- while it is never easy to be a guinea pig -- I think this program has helped NDI expand its civic portfolio and develop an institutional capacity that it previously lacked. I would also like to put on record here that I was fully aware of all the shortcomings of the program that are mentioned in the report and agree with their characterization. This of course led me to consider on a number of occasions whether or not we should

continue the program. During the program's duration, my thoughts were consistently that we should continue, try to address some of the shortcomings, although some of them were endemic and that ultimately the program was worth conducting, and did achieve some notable results. However, it was undoubtedly a close call.

COMMENTS on report

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The issue of involving Trenčín NGOs in the election candidate forums: this was a subject of on going discussion after the event with Jerry M. His position is accurately reflected in the report and I accept his judgement of the consequences. HOWEVER, I continue to believe that without that initial high profile energizing activity, getting anything at all off the ground in Trenčín prior to Jerry's departure might not have been possible. The energy and publicity generated by the event (and as the report notes, candidate forums have now become widespread in Slovakia = unintended consequence) kept the coalition leaders involved and interested.

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Morrison felt in retrospect that a two-year commitment would have been more realistic. In truth, both Jerry and his wife Larissa were very keen to leave Trenčín after one year. The small city environment was very foreign to their Chicago based experience and they both felt very isolated with the language barrier -- we subsequently quizzed Bill Wood as to his ability to live in a small rural town and were reassured at the time. However, once again Wood suffered the same feelings and did not want to extend his stay.

The difficulty of recruiting experienced community organizers at the outset of this program, let alone individuals ready to make a long-term commitment (even after NDI understood the long term need) was considerable. NDI did not have any network of trainers in the community organizing world. Hence the four-month gap in replacing Morrison, leaving an inexperienced, albeit talented, Slovak to try to keep the coalition together and losing considerable momentum. There were times when the NDI 'bureaucracy' and emphasis on report writing did not mix well with the community organizer action oriented approach. However, I think NDI has made great progress now in expanding its network of potential community organizer field representatives, which was virtually nonexistent at the outset of this program.

I have already touched on the difficulties of retaining Slovak organizers and agree that a later training visit to the States would have reaped considerably more benefit. This was in fact DC's view, but since we lacked the institutional knowledge to back up our position at the time initially weakened DC's hand in over riding field representative decisions of this nature. In retrospect this feeling of imbalance between field representative experience and the lack of it in DC, may well have resulted in me taking a less strong directive and managerial role than usual, or at minimum being less sure of the grounds on which to make judgement calls.

CONCLUSIONS

Absolutely agree with all conclusions. But would strengthen the second one to the effect that NDI should not undertake community organizing programs unless there is a realistic expectation of long term funding from a funder who understands the long term nature of the program.

The third conclusion on a three-year commitment -- good luck!

The fourth: this conclusion means that in choosing a country to conduct such a program, extensive prior research needs to be done to ascertain the likelihood of identifying such individuals (a long term funding commitment and basing the project in urban areas helps) and the pattern of employment in the country (i.e., do most people work more than one job to make ends meet (as in Slovakia) and will NDI salaries provide enough incentive without distorting the local employment picture)?

Probably more than other types of NDI programs, I believe that this type of program should not and could not become the latest trend for NDI. Expand this part of the NDI portfolio slowly! Not least because I think we still have some way to go in effectively explaining the political impact of community organizing. I cannot count the number of times that I needed to ask "so what" of both DC and field based staff on this program who would proudly reel off the number of traffic signs that had been erected or graffiti removed from walls (in fact it took me a while to understand that that graffiti initiative was about putting it on select walls!) or some such other action without recounting the PROCESS behind it. Until we are much better at this (and there has been considerable improvement) it will remain a challenge to obtain and extend funding for this type of program.

Final: should be repeated ad infinitum, community organizing takes at least three years to take root in one site in the US -- calculate with care the multiplier effect of the time it will take in a new democracy, especially in those regions where there is no tradition of political and civic dissent.

NB

I would really be interested to hear about NDI's plans for location of any future community organizing and the basis for the choice.

Appendix 2
Organizing Campaigns in Central Slovakia (1996-1999)

Organizing Campaigns in Central Slovakia (1996-1999)

This document illustrates and explains the organizing campaign successfully conducted by NDI-trained organizers in central Slovakia.

In each case, the location of the campaign is given, as well as the name of the organizer responsible.

The cases also include a description of activities during the run-up to the 1998 parliamentary elections.

The document was drafted by the Deputy Director of the Citizen Action Center Bodhan Smieska.

Appendix 3
Report on 1994 Community Power Analysis in
Trencin, Slovakia

(Not Available for the Web)

Appendix 4
Evaluation Team Biographies

(Not Available for the Web)

Appendix 5
October 1999 Evaluation Interviewees

NDI Staff Members (present and past)

Rob Benjamin, NDI Deputy Director, Central and East European Team, Washington, DC

Claude Zullo, NDI Program Officer, Central and East European Team, Washington, DC

Matt Baker, NDI Program Assistant, Central and East European Team, Washington, DC

Keith Jennings, NDI Director, Citizen Participation Team, Washington, DC

Jerry Morrison, Former NDI Resident Representative, Trencin, Slovakia

David Sip, Former NDI Resident Representative, Presov, Slovakia

Chuck Hirt, Former NDI Resident Representative, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Donor Representatives

Roger Potocki, NED, Washington, DC

Kathy Stermer, Chief, USAID Democracy and Governance, Bratislava, Slovakia

Gustav Matijek, USAID Project Advisor, Bratislava, Slovakia

Trencin Informal Association (TNZ)

Richard Medal, TNZ Director, Trencin, Slovakia

TNZ Staff Assistant, Trencin, Slovakia

TNZ Volunteer, Trencin, Slovakia

Presov Civic Forum (POF)

Slavo Gibarti, POF Director, Presov, Slovakia

Ludek Mlococh, POF Project Coordinator, Presov, Slovakia

Sofia Temkovitzova, POF Board Member, Presov, Slovakia

Rasto Mochnacky, POF Board Member, (former organizer), Presov, Slovakia

Katarina Minarova, POF Board Member, Presov, Slovakia

POF Volunteer

POF Volunteer

Presov Community Foundation

Katarina Minarova, Director (former NDI staff assistant), Presov, Slovakia

Emily ?, Project Assistant, Presov, Slovakia

Community Organizers USAID Program

Andrea Bucevova, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Maria Kamasova, Litiva, Slovakia

Anna Karailieva, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Daniela Konecna, Nitra, Slovakia

Drahamira Kucekova, Lucenec, Slovakia

Olga Moravikova, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Vladimir Sedo, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Bohdan Smieska, Nitra, Slovakia

Helena Strmenova, Nitra, Slovakia

Kayo Zboril, Zvolen, Slovakia

Other Program Observers

Lauren Colletta, Community Organizing Trainer, Chicago, IL

Boris Strecansky, Program Manager, Environmental Training Project, Bratislava, Slovakia

Juraj Mesik, Environmental NGO Leader, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Chuck Daugherty, American Expatriate Fundraising Consultant, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Lindsay Lloyd, IRI Resident Representative, Bratislava, Slovakia

Barbara Miller, NDI Resident Representative, Bratislava, Slovakia

David Zanjac, Grants Coordinator, Your Land Program, Bratislava, Slovakia

Peter Lacny, Vice-Mayor, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Lubica Lachka, Coordinator, Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA), Nitra, Slovakia