

Good Governance Impact Example Series

Kosovo: Strengthening Capacity at the Municipal Level

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Equitable and inclusive participation in public-decision making can help communities safeguard peace in fragile, post-conflict environments. However, plural participation poses a complex feat where polarization along ethnic lines has fractured horizontal relationships within a society and vertical linkages between citizens and government. These communities face yet graver obstacles to participatory governance where they confront the social and material challenges of reintegrating returnees.

Key governance themes: accountable decision-making, accountability, participation, inclusiveness, responsiveness

Mercy Corps' experience in Kosovo illustrates how communities can achieve participatory governance amidst a dynamic returns process and social linkages among ethnic groups torn apart by conflict. During the events of 1999, Kosovo experienced a NATO bombing campaign, the displacement of over 800,000 Kosovans, the subsequent displacement of Serb, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) populations and the looting and burning of property. In the years immediately following, Mercy Corps has helped build trust between municipalities and communities so that together they can improve conditions for and inclusion of returnees.

Kosovans at the community-level have identified municipalities as the most effective access point for stimulating progress towards stability and recovery. Mercy Corps has thus targeted community-municipal relations as a powerful avenue to revive horizontal linkages amongst communities alongside vertical linkages between citizen and municipality.

An Incentive-Based Approach

Mercy Corps-Kosovo's Municipal Integration and Support Initiative (MISI) deployed an incentive-based scheme to encourage municipal authorities to take a lead in the return and reintegration of minority citizens, whilst stimulating cooperation within communities. Capable municipal authorities also received funding for infrastructure projects that they could implement jointly with communities. As community members have asserted, the MISI approach provided an "opportunity to improve interethnic relations and reintegrate Kosovo Serbs [and other minorities] into municipal structures" while "trust-building between the municipal authorities and citizens."

Hallmarks of the MISI approach include:

1. Establishment of Municipal Steering Groups as contact points with the community.
2. Creation of Community Working Groups (CWGs), which draw together citizens from majority and minority groups.
3. Joint development between the steering groups and CWGs of Action Plans, which identify obstacles to return and reintegration, and methods for how to overcome them.
4. Monitoring of Action Plan implementation.
5. Funding rewards for municipalities that progress in Action Plan implementation.
6. Facilitation of transparent and participatory processes for infrastructure project selection and implementation.

From Trust to Participation

Mercy Corps-Kosovo has recognized that propagating trust sustains equitable and inclusive participation. Trust binds citizens to their communal duties and municipalities to their civic responsibilities. MISI sought to create this bind at all levels of implementation. For example, as MISI entered its second phase, it established a municipality mentoring program. Authorities with MISI experience conducted exchange visits and gave support to municipalities that had newly committed to the program. In addition, MISI helped municipalities build trust and credibility amongst communities through public media. Officials learnt how to employ a range of media to disseminate messages of support for minority returns while reassuring communities.

Mercy Corps Kosovo also recognized that MISI could strengthen trust between municipalities and youth so communities could sustain participatory governance processes. As one school teacher and CWG member asserted, “The most important thing is to create basic conditions for youth. We want to attract young people to stay.” MISI reached over 3,400 youth across Kosovo through multi-ethnic camps, sporting activities and trainings. A multi-ethnic camp coordinator recalls that “At the beginning of the camp, the children kept themselves within their ethnic group – language being the main barrier. As time went on, they became more and more open and became good friends. At the end, they cried because they had to part.”

The propagation of trust reinforced municipal procedures conducive to integration and supported transparent collaboration between communities and municipalities for infrastructure development. In addition, 85% of municipal authorities asserted that MISI enhanced community processes and participation, in addition to tangible infrastructure development. Community members also evidenced this change, with 96% claiming that their communities felt ownership of infrastructure projects.

By using infrastructure as the entry point for reestablishing linkages among groups, community-driven approaches like MISI provide a low risk way for people to identify common interests that can help bridge otherwise divisive issues between communities. The linkages that programs like MISI build provide communities with the preconditions to pursue more ambitious initiatives in the pursuit of a secure, productive and just society.

Municipal-Community Collaboration for Reintegration

Fehmi Sadiku serves as School Director of the only primary school in Balaj/Baljaj village, Ferizaj/ Uroševac Municipality. Balaj/Baljaj is home to 1,840 residents and has faced tides of returnees. Before MISI, Sadiku struggled to provide the village's 250 primary school pupils with the education they deserved. Sadiku had to run two shifts of the school each day and did not have the facilities for a science department. The school had no absorptive capacity for returning children.

Through MISI, the community of Balaj/Baljaj had the opportunity to present a school expansion project to municipal authorities for consideration. Following election of a Community Working Group, Sadiku and his fellow committee members worked closely with municipal officials and received trainings in project planning, implementation and monitoring. Sadiku recalls how trainings brought CWG members into contact with municipal officials: “They informed us about the structure and function of local government. We were actively involved in daily monitoring... before this program cooperation with the municipality was weak. But since we have started working with the municipality this relationship has improved and we hope that this cooperation will continue in future.”

Now, Sadiku has fulfilled his hope of building a school annex. Through joint efforts between community and municipality, Balaj/Baljaj primary school can welcome returnees into a culture of collaboration.



Mercy Corps team member Emame Daeni receives a gift of thanks from the president of the AgraQirezi farmers association while the mayor of the municipality looks on. A Mercy Corps grant provided two-thirds of the overall purchase cost of 10 new pieces of equipment, while the municipality and farmers themselves contributed the balance and are responsible for maintenance.

Photo: David Snyder/Mercy Corps. Kosovo, 2007

This Good Governance Impact Example is one of a series included in Mercy Corps' Guide to Good Governance Programming. For more information, please contact Ruth Allen, Director for Community Mobilization, Governance and Partnerships at rallen@bos.mercycorps.org