

Assessment of the results of the project 'Promoting local democracy in Ukraine'

Extracts

Prepared for: Council of Europe

Date: 28 February 2018



Contents

Contents	1
Abbreviations	2
Executive Summary	3
1 Conclusions	6
2 Recommendations	7
2.1 Recommendations specific to cooperation in Ukraine.....	7
2.2 Recommendations that apply to future cooperation in Ukraine that can be adapted to future cooperation in other countries.....	9

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AAC	Association of Amalgamated Communities
AUC	Association of Ukrainian Cities
CELGR	Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform
Charter	European Charter of Local Self-Government
Congress	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
DOBRE	Decentralization Offering Better Results And Efficiency programme funded by USAID
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
LAP	Leadership Academy Programme
LSG	Local Self-Government
MRD	Ministry of Regional Development, Construction and Municipal Services of Ukraine
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCSB	Parliamentary Committee of State Building, Regional Policy and Local Self-Government
PGG	Partnership for Good Governance
UAROC	Ukrainian Association of Raion and Oblast Councils
UAVSC	Ukrainian Association of Village and Settlement Councils
UDC	Ukrainian Delegation to Congress
YLL	Young Local Leaders

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report covers the assessment of the Congress project 'Promoting Local Democracy in Ukraine'.¹ It covers the period from the project's launch on 01 July 2015 until the end of its implementation on 31 December 2017. The project was originally planned to end in mid-2018 but the date was brought forward to comply with new Council of Europe programming guidelines. The project was granted a two-month no-cost extension until the end February 2018 to finalise administration-related activities.

The assessment was undertaken between mid-January and mid-February 2018. It involved desk research, and interviews and focus group meetings involving approximately 70 stakeholders. 19 meetings were held with stakeholders in Kyiv from 05 to 08 February and some interviews were undertaken by Skype, telephone, and email. The assessment also involved an online survey targeting 429 project participants, which generated 131 responses.

Project aims

The project aimed to promote the application of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Charter). More specifically, it aimed to develop new understandings, capacities, and approaches at personal level amongst local and regional leaders. It also aimed to develop common understandings of, and commitment to, the reformed legal and institutional framework for local self-government in Ukraine. Finally, it aimed to enhance understanding of the role of Congress and the role of the Ukrainian Delegation to Congress (UDC). Project activities included a series of 2 day workshops for mayors and local councillors respectively, and 3-day regional seminars for young local leaders (YLL). Major investments were also made in networking events and, as well as a international study visits for mayors, local councillors, and YLL.

Findings and conclusions

The project is directly relevant to the mandate of Congress and to the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2015 – 2017. It also supports Ukrainian local self-government (LSG) policy and reform agenda in the areas of community amalgamation and decentralisation by aiming to enhance the leadership capacities of local and regional leaders to better equip them to take advantage of new opportunities for community development, as well as to enable them to meet new challenges and responsibilities. Stakeholder feedback that project activities are highly relevant to the needs and expectations of local and regional leaders. At strategic level, the project aimed

¹ The official title of the project given in the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2015-2017 is 'the project title has changed to 'Strengthening the Capacity of Local Elected Authorities to Implement Effective and Efficient Decentralisation Reforms'. However, the project has generally been referred to by the short title 'Promoting Local Democracy in Ukraine'.

to support development of structures and processes to enable effective application of the Charter's principles.

Congress is uniquely placed to provide support on the application of the principles of the Charter. Whereas other projects focus on structures, systems, and infrastructure, the Congress local democracy project has focused on developing understanding and application of local democracy concepts. Moreover, the project has been an important source of support at the local level, especially for local councillors, for whom little other support is available.

Stakeholder feedback and survey responses indicate that the project has been highly effective in changing thinking and approaches to local democracy at local and regional levels, and this feedback and survey responses suggest that these changes are being translated into improved services, including more recognition of the needs and expectations of women in local policy making, although developments on this point appears to be lagging behind other developments. There are numerous examples of local initiatives that have been inspired by participation in project activities. The project has generated much networking activity that continues to enable local leaders to learn from, and support, each other. Survey results confirm that the project has helped to enhance knowledge, especially in relation to European standards for local and regional democracy. It has also enhanced leadership skills and given participants confidence to promote change in their communities. There are also some indications that the project has contributed to positive developments in communities, in particular with regard to community engagement and expectations of leaders. The project has also influenced institutional and structural developments in line with the Charter's principles, including the appointment of member to the UDC, and the provision of secretariat for the UDC.

Highly positive stakeholder feedback about the organisation of activities, together with positive feedback about project outcomes suggest strongly that the project has been efficiently implemented. At a cost of approximately €1.8 million, the project has involved some 600 local and regional leaders in seminars and workshops of 2 to 3 days each. It has also organised 5 international study visits. Numerous Ukrainian and international experts have been engaged in these activities, as well as Ukrainian and foreign members of Congress. The project has also organised a series of high level meetings and roundtables at central level. Nevertheless, in view of the operational overhead associated with each activity, it may be worth reflecting on the efficiency of implementing such a large range of activities within a single 2.5 year project. In particular, although it was considered very useful, the efficiency of the grant scheme set up to award just 5 small grants could be questioned.

There are strong indications that project benefits will be maintained and further developed. The planned follow-on project is expected to further institutionalise the Charter's principles at local, regional, and central levels. The extensive networking activity generated by the project is continuing to function, providing local leaders with inspiration and enabling them to learn from

each other. Some stakeholder feedback suggests that further support targeting smaller communities would be desirable to maintain the enthusiasm and momentum for change that has been generated by the project.

Main recommendations

It is suggested that consideration should be given as to how the envisaged intensified cooperation with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) may impact other LSG associations. It is recommended to ensure the continued involvement of the other LSG associations in future Congress activities, as they have demonstrated their willingness to disseminate information about events and project materials to their members. This may also help to ensure more complete coverage of smaller communities, which generally have limited access to other support (especially local councillors), and where the present project has reportedly added most value.

While synergies between the two Council of Europe LSG projects has been good,² stakeholder feedback indicates that there may be scope for more institutionalised synergies between them, which that could potentially enhance the overall effectiveness of Council of Europe activities in the area of local democracy in Ukraine.

Although gender was not envisaged as a key issue to be addressed by the project, it does appear to have brought about some changes in thinking on gender equality and mainstreaming. It would be desirable for the next Congress project to further develop understanding of these issues and their application in LSG. To this end, it may be helpful to consider if and how the knowledge and expertise of the gender advisor in the Council of Europe Office in Kyiv may be further leveraged.

While project duration is of course limited, it may nevertheless be desirable to utilise a longer planning horizon when considering the needs of the target groups. This could enhance continuity and impact.

² The Congress project that is the subject of this assessment 'Promoting Local Democracy in Ukraine', and the project 'Decentralisation and territorial consolidation in Ukraine' that was managed by the Council of Europe's Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform.

1 Conclusions

Relevance

The project is directly relevant to the mandate of Congress and to the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2015 – 2017. It has also supported Ukrainian LSG policy and reform agenda in the areas of community amalgamation and decentralisation by enhancing the leadership capacities of local and regional leaders to take advantage of new opportunities for community development, as well as to meet new challenges and responsibilities. Stakeholder feedback indicates that project activities have been highly relevant to the needs and expectations of local and regional leaders. At strategic level, the project aims and activities, to support development of structures and processes to enable effective application of the Charter's principles, have been directly relevant to supporting Ukraine's participation in Congress in line with the Charter's principles.

Added value

Congress is uniquely placed to provide support on the application of the principles of the Charter. Whereas other projects focus on structures, systems, and infrastructure, the Congress local democracy project has focused on developing understanding and application of local democracy. The project is an important source of support at the local level, especially for local councillors, for whom it has been the main, and in many cases, only source of support to date.

There are good synergies with the CELGR's decentralisation project, although there are potential some areas in which synergies could be further leveraged.

Effectiveness

Stakeholder feedback and survey responses indicate that the project has been highly effective in changing thinking and approaches to local democracy at local and regional levels, and stakeholder feedback suggests that these changes are being translated into improved services. There are numerous examples of local initiatives that have been inspired by participation in project activities. The project has generated much networking activity that continues to enable local leaders to learn from each other. Survey results confirm that the project has changed ways of thinking about local democracy and has helped to enhance knowledge, especially in relation to European standards for local and regional democracy. It has also enhanced leadership skills and given participants confidence to promote change in their communities. There are also some indications that the project has contributed to positive developments in communities, in particular with regard to community engagement and expectations of leaders. The survey also indicates development in areas such cooperation between different statutory actors and bodies, although to a lesser extent, and while there have been changes in thinking about gender, this appears to be the area in which the fewest survey respondents consider progress has been made at community level.

The project has also influenced institutional and structural developments in line with the Charter's principles.

Efficiency

At a cost of approximately €1.8 million, the project has involved some 600 local and regional leaders in 20 2-3 day seminars over a period of two and a half years. It has also organised 5 international study visits for a selection of participants. Numerous Ukrainian and international experts have been engaged in these activities, as well as Ukrainian and foreign members of Congress. The project has also organised a series of high level meetings and roundtables at central level. Nevertheless, there must be doubts about the efficiency of launching a grant scheme for the award of just 5 grants, given the administrative overhead involved.

Highly positive stakeholder feedback about the organisation of activities, together with positive feedback about project outcomes suggest strongly that the project has been efficiently implemented.

Sustainability

There are strong indications that project benefits will be maintained and further developed. The planned follow-on project is expected to further institutionalise the Charter's principles at local, regional, and central levels. The extensive networking activity generated by the project is continuing to function, providing local leaders with inspiration and enabling them to learn from each other. There are examples of new structures and regulations at local level, which should also help to sustain the gains that have been made. The momentum for change generated by the project amongst leaders from smaller communities can be maintained with further targeted support.

2 Recommendations

The recommendations are divided into:

- Recommendations specific to cooperation in Ukraine;
- Recommendations that apply to future cooperation in Ukraine that can be adapted to future cooperation in other countries

2.1 Recommendations specific to cooperation in Ukraine

2.1.1 LSG Associations

It is understood that the next Congress project will intensify cooperation with the AUC and that project activities will, to a large extent, be delivered through the AUC, and its network of branch offices. It is recommended to ensure the continued involvement of the other national associations in future Congress activities, as they have demonstrated their willingness to

disseminate information about events and project materials to their members. The Council of Europe Office in Ukraine considers that the AAC in particular should be kept involved, as this is expected to have growing importance in the coming years, although it does not currently have the status of 'national association'.

It is recommended to consider how the AUC and other associations can be helped to maintain and further develop support to elected leaders in smaller, more remote communities. Congress could, for example, support LSG associations to develop a curriculum and/ or programme of activities specifically addressing the needs of local councillors. A significant added value of the project under assessment is that it has focused on local leaders who receive little other support, in particular local councillors. Interviewed stakeholders also point out that leaders from the smaller communities have the most need to increase their capacities and encountered most difficulties in assimilating new ideas and concepts. Finally, stakeholder feedback suggests that this group will benefit from further support to enable them to continue to challenge entrenched views and approaches.

It seems that some mayors who were involved in the project plan to establish a new association (i.e. the 'Association of Local Democracy') to institutionalise their relations, to systematise networking and to lobby at national level. However, other mayors consider there is no need to create a new association because the existing national associations, particularly the AUC could already meet these needs. It would be useful to understand if the emergence of this and other new associations in recent years, regardless of their status as NGOs, points to needs that are not being effectively met by the more established associations, and this in turn might suggest new areas in which Congress could support LSG associations in Ukraine.

2.1.2 Cooperation with central actors

Congress could consider further cooperation activities with the PCSB in view of the positive outcome of the cooperation to date. For example, the PCSB hopes to involve Congress in a series of roundtables on local governance that the PCSB is planning to organise.

It may be worth considering how and to what extent communication can be enhanced between the future Congress project and the MRD and the UDC pending the transfer of the secretariat of the UDC to the AUC.

2.1.3 International experience sharing

It may be preferable to prioritize exchanges with countries in Central and Eastern Europe such as Poland and the Baltic states, which have undergone similar LSG restructuring processes in recent years. Several stakeholders point out that LSG leaders in Ukraine are particularly interested in examples from these countries. One international stakeholder suggests that Western European experiences may be 'too remote' from the current situation of many Ukrainian communities.

2.1.4 Synergies between Council of Europe activities in Ukraine

Stakeholder feedback indicates that there may be scope for more institutionalised synergies between the activities of Congress and the activities of the CELGR that could potentially enhance the overall effectiveness of Council of Europe activities in the area of local democracy in Ukraine. For example:

- Consideration could be given to the establishment of a single expert group for consultation on legislation;
- Congress activities could help to disseminate Council of Europe tools for working with LSG associations;
- Best practices and success stories could perhaps be more systematically exchanged between the two strands of support;
- Consideration could be given to establishing a joint pool of trainers.

2.1.5 Human resources

The project team in Kyiv appears to be somewhat stretched. While efficiency of the project is reported to have been good, it is possible that future efficiency could be enhanced by reviewing the internal allocation of roles and tasks, and if necessary, increasing the number of project staff in Kyiv.

2.2 Recommendations that apply to future cooperation in Ukraine that can be adapted to future cooperation in other countries

2.2.1 Gender

The project appears to have had some impact on gender equality and mainstreaming at the local level. However, these issues remain low on the agenda in Ukraine, and there is reported to be some resistance to discussing them. Some stakeholder feedback also suggests that these issues may not be well understood, including at central level. It would be highly desirable for the next Congress project to develop understanding of gender equality and mainstreaming and their application in LSG. To this end, it may be helpful to consider if and how the knowledge and expertise of the gender advisor in the Council of Europe Office may be further leveraged.

2.2.2 Capacity building – mayors and local councillors

The effectiveness of future capacity building activities at local and regional levels could be enhanced by:

- Undertaking a stakeholder mapping exercise and a needs analysis to enhance fine tuning of activities to the needs of specific groups;
- Providing an overview of recent changes in Ukrainian legislation;

- Providing more examples of Ukrainian success stories to demonstrate how European principles and ideas can be adopted in Ukraine;
- Organising joint training for all target groups from the same region to facilitate future cooperation and networking;
- Promoting project activities more actively at the local level (e.g. via media) to involve more active citizens.
- Including special training modules on:
 - Cooperation between civil society and local government;
 - Gender equality and inclusiveness;
 - Decentralization (based on new legislation);
 - Ethics and transparency;
- Focusing more on specific community challenges, such as education and healthcare;
- Involving members of the Group of Independent Experts on the Charter more actively.

2.2.3 Young local leaders

The effectiveness of capacity building for YLL could be enhanced by:

- Recruiting young experts and trainers, especially project alumni, to train young people, and by organising exchange visits between young people from different communities;
- Providing personal post-training mentorship and possibly mini-grants for YLL to increase and sustain their capacities to promote local democracy;
- Promoting and supporting internships for YLL in local government to combine the efforts of YLL, local councillors and mayors from the same community who participated in project activities;
- Various stakeholders suggest that Congress could involve more young people, including school children, in future project activities addressing issues such as democratic citizenship and human rights.

2.2.4 Grants

Compliance with grant procedures was challenging for the beneficiaries, in part due to their limited capacity and in part due to differences between Council of Europe requirements and Ukrainian regulations. In the event that Congress launches grant schemes in future, directly or indirectly, it would be highly desirable to ensure that administrative procedures are kept as simple as possible. This will likely require dialogue between the Council of Europe Office in Kyiv, Congress, and other departments in Strasbourg.

Several stakeholders also suggest that it would be preferable to make grants available at the beginning of the financial year, as this would facilitate the organisation of beneficiaries' budgets.

It may also be helpful to provide information about other sources of funding that can be used to maintain and extend networking between communities, including funding for cross-border cooperation with communities in neighbouring European Union Member States.

2.2.5 Reflection and learning

Engaging experts in reflection and learning

It is recommended that the project team (in Kyiv and Strasbourg) periodically engage with experts and peer contributors in a systematic strategic learning dialogue. Interview feedback suggests that international expert and peer contributors to workshops and seminars are highly motivated to learn more about the effectiveness of the activities they have supported and the project overall. This interest could perhaps be more systematically leveraged as part of a learning process that could (a) look at how similar activities might be enhanced in future, and (b) generate ideas for different approaches and directions.

Data analysis

There is scope to make more systematic use of project information to analyse project outcomes and develop ideas for adjustments and future activities and interventions. For example:

- A large amount of data has been collected about the many project participants but there are significant differences in the three lists (mayors, local councillors, and YLL) limiting their usefulness for analysis. The list of mayors in particular includes a lot of formatting that has to be removed in order to undertake analysis.
- The project has systematically collected feedback forms from workshop and seminar participants. It is understood that these have been used primarily to review individual project activities but that there has been limited strategic analysis of this information.

It would be highly desirable in future to give more consideration in advance to what information can be collected, and what tools are needed to do this and to analyse the collected the information. For example:

- It may worth making a small investment in the development of a simple database with a graphical user interface to collect and analyse information about large numbers of participants in a systematic and consistent way;
- Similarly, it may be worth considering a small investment in a multi-page document scanner and software to scan and process feedback forms so that feedback can be aggregated and analysed;
- Consideration could also be given to analysis of sentiment about project activities on certain social media platforms. It could, for example, be possible to establish a project account on a suitable social media platform to collect such feedback.

These examples may be less relevant for the next Congress project, but this does not diminish the need to consider, in advance, suitable outcome indicators together with systems and tools for collecting and analysing outcome data.

2.2.6 Depth of subject coverage and scope of activities

Taking into account the Ukrainian context, it is highly likely that more time will be needed to change the target groups' behaviour regarding ethics, transparency, corruption, conflicts of interest and gender equality. These are themes where participants made less progress according to most stakeholders and trainers consulted.

It may be worth considering allowing project participants to participate in more than one World Forum for Democracy study visit to Strasbourg. YLL suggest that a second visit would have enabled them to gain more practical knowledge on tools in specific thematic areas, whereas the first visit was very useful in enabling them to decide which tools are most relevant to their communities.

YLL suggest that it would be helpful to provide more practical tools on how to run for office. They had expected that the project would provide them with more information about this.

2.2.7 Best practices and examples of successful initiatives

Mayors and local councillors would find it very useful to have more visits to other communities in Ukraine. It is suggested to explore whether this could be feasible. They note that it is also important to understand that initiatives may not work in different contexts, and with this in mind, it may be worth considering the development of case studies on initiatives that did not work as expected, anonymised if necessary.

2.2.8 Publications

It is suggested the Council of Europe translate and disseminate more publications for use by actors at regional and local levels. A selection of relevant stakeholders should be canvassed to identify what publications should be translated into Ukrainian. Several stakeholders pointed to the importance of translated books and manuals provided by the project and stressed the need for more on different subjects. It was also pointed out that the lack of translated materials limited the dissemination of knowledge to local councillors who did not participate in the project.

It is suggested that the training materials be compiled into a single handbook for use in future projects.

2.2.9 Selection criteria and process

It would be desirable to make the criteria and process for selecting candidates to participate in future more transparent. Some YLL felt that the process for selecting local councillor participants was not transparent and this raised doubts about the fairness of the process.

2.2.10 Continuity

The planning horizon should extend beyond a single 2.5 year project. Ethics, transparency, corruption, conflicts of interest and gender equality are themes were participants made less progress according to most stakeholders and trainers consulted. Taking into account the Ukrainian context, it is highly likely that more time will be needed to change the target groups' behaviour regarding these issues. Moreover, feedback suggests that continuing support is needed in smaller communities to maintain and reinforce the gains that have already been made. While a follow-on project is envisaged, it is not yet clear what form this will take, and to what extent it will address these points.

In future, it may worth considering extending the grant scheme and mentors (Ukrainian trainers and experts) to support implementation of more initiatives undertaken by project participants following the workshops and seminars (the present project provided grants to just 5 mayors). This would enhance the effectiveness of the project and would be more efficient (spreading administrative overheads further). Efficiency could be further enhanced if, rather than funding and managing grant schemes itself, the Council of Europe could instead facilitate funding through another programme.

Trainers suggest that it would be helpful to establish a formal network of trainers and experts who can systematically exchange experiences on training practices.

It would be useful to involve former project participants in future activities and events organised by the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine. This would ensure their continuing exposure European LSG principles and approaches, and it would provide an opportunity to continue, informally, to monitor developments in communities that have already been supported by Congress.

2.2.11 Visibility

The Council of Europe could in future make more use of the local media for more effective dissemination about forthcoming and completed events and activities, as well as local initiatives implemented with the project.