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LEARNING FROM LOCAL WORKS PROGRAM APPROACHES IN SERBIA



PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND MOBILIZATION:

1. Different instruments of direct support based on initiatives' needs, on a continuous basis. Programs that offer a range of direct support enhance grassroots activism and increase resilience. These may include:
 - a. Financial support: with different packages from rapid to long-term, depending on the nature and scope of local actions.
 - b. Training and networking: for establishing linkages, and exchange of information, with interactive format and content.
 - c. Individual mentoring support: in the areas of strategic importance and for building soft skills.
 - d. Media support: for utilization of different media channels, creating media relations, public appearances, and messaging.
 - e. Legal support: both in terms of legal counseling and representation.
2. Decentralization of civic programs and the development of the "local hubs of change" will generate more civic initiatives and citizen engagement. This approach will bring more intensive development of new grassroots initiatives in underdeveloped municipalities and rural areas, attain the attention of the citizens across the country, and it may reestablish trust and partnership within the civil society sector overall.
3. Promote versatile organizational models in institutional development. The promotion of civil society organization models that are more agile without rigid hierarchies and overwhelming bureaucracy and that support innovation, such as the network model, is of utmost importance for grassroots initiatives. Not all initiatives aim to grow into large-scale civil society organizations, hence they need structures that are at the same time operational and non-burdensome.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND MOBILIZATION:

1. Trust is a baseline. The primary prerequisite of mobilization is building trust, which requires time and consistent personalized communication, not just in terms of content and message, but also in terms of having a consistent group of people from organizations engaged in the communication.
2. Adjustment of communication channels to target different groups and local contexts. For effective citizen mobilization, it is wise to integrate different approaches and communication channels as it helps create constituencies across different groups. This is especially important for the engagement of underserved groups such as youth, women, LGBTQI+, ethnic or religious minorities, and people in rural areas.
3. The utilization of different media platforms is key to building larger constituencies. Depending on the targeted audience demographic, including age, place of living, and education, an initiative may use social networks, radio, or television. While many of the initiatives lean toward social networks as an easily accessible, fast, and relatively inexpensive medium for communication, TV channels, especially those with national coverage, play an important role in both promoting and affirming local initiatives.
4. Clear, understandable, and informative messaging is key. Some topics are too abstract or complex and require well-thought-out messaging or storytelling to capture citizen attention. Storytelling can be used to entertain, inform, or educate. It is about sharing information creatively and memorably, developing empathy, persuading, and motivating people to take action.
5. Promoting solutions and success stories demonstrates that engagement works and builds a culture of optimism. Showcasing activists' experiences, small victories, and the inclusion of local heroes, influencers, or celebrities, can help to sustain momentum and demonstrate the positive outcomes of citizen engagement as a counterpoint to typical unmotivating narratives that the status quo is inexorable.
6. Creativity, authenticity, and active participation engage more people. Initiatives that offer something "different", (i.e., organize authentic events with original content, and events that bring citizens together not just as an audience, but as active participants), can stand out and attract more citizens than traditional approaches.
7. Partnership models that include different stakeholders create stronger bonds and outlooks for success. Building partnerships with different stakeholders, such as businesses, government institutions, and other civic initiatives, can be used to leverage different resources, knowledge, and capacities and provide leverage for greater outcomes. Involvement of relevant public institutions in the early stages of identifying a problem and developing a solution is, in some cases, key to the institutions' positioning.

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