



Partners - Albania, Center for  
Change and Conflict Management

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S U C C E S S   S T O R I E S  
O F P R O G R A M B E N E F I C I A R I E S

2001 - 2004



Partners - Albania, Center for  
Change and Conflict Management

# SUCCESS STORIES OF PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES 2001 - 2004

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## INTRODUCTION

Partners – Albania (P-A), Center for Change and Conflict Management is an independent Albanian NPO with a mission to advance civil society and a culture of change and conflict management in Albania. The Center was established in 2001 with funding from USAID and in cooperation with Partners for Democratic Change, a U.S.-based international organization committed to building sustainable local capacity to advance civil society and democracy worldwide.

Since its inception, Partners – Albania has coordinated various programs aiming at advancement of democracy and civil society in Albania through building institutional and individual capacities and enabling effective collaboration within and between the NPO sector, local government, academia and social groups.

Partners-Albania's programs fall under the following three pillars:

### I. NPO SUPPORT

Strengthening the vibrancy of the civil society sector in Albania to more effectively respond to social development needs of the country

### II. LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY BUILDING

Enhancing local government's ability to better manage the challenge of decentralization and effectively engage with citizens

### III. LEADERSHIP AND COLABORATION

Expanding civic participation of Albanian citizens by developing leadership skills and promoting collaborative processes

From 2001 to 2004 the diverse programs implemented by Partners-Albania impacted thousands of people from all over the country and from across all sectors. The Center trained over 800 representatives of civil society organizations, over 400 local government officials and drew more than 600 participants to its women and youth leadership and academic programs. The real impact of Partners-Albania's work is visible through the achievements of each of the participants in their programs.

This document presents a small sample of selected Success Stories of organizations or individuals who participated in Partners – Albania's programs or benefited from its services.

For more information about the Center's programs and initiatives to date please refer to the Activity Report June 2001 - July 2004, published by Partners – Albania.

## I. NPO SUPPORT

Strengthening the capacity of NPOs in Albania has been the main focus of Partners-Albania's work over the past three years. Following a thorough needs assessment of the Albanian third sector, Partners-Albania designed a program which responds to the identified needs of NPOs by providing them with trainings, introducing new skills and empowering NPOs to work across sectors and professional fields. To date, Partners-Albania has trained over 800 NPO representatives and accepted contracts from many international organizations to assist in their NPO development programs.

The Small Grants Program, co-designed by Partners for Democratic Change and Partners-Albania and supported by USAID, aimed to provide multidimensional assistance to locally registered Albanian NPOs seeking to assist targeted underserved groups and communities through various programs in the social services area.

Over the past 3 years Partners-Albania disbursed \$873,932 in small grants to local NPOs focusing on providing social services to Albanian communities. During five grant rounds, a total of 51 grants were awarded. In addition to financial support of proposed projects, grantees received customized trainings and technical assistance from Partners – Albania. This innovative model of grant giving has been very successful in strengthening the organizational as well as programmatic ability of many Albanian NPOs.

### A. Women, Children and Youth Issues

#### Introducing Psycho-Social Services to Tirana's Schools

*Association of Young Researchers for Social Sciences*

*The Albanian Institute for Social and Psychological Studies*

For many teenagers in Albania, the decade of political transition and the opening of the country's market to Western influences have created unexpected challenges and potential threats. New risks such as drugs, alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases, trafficking for sexual exploitation, physical or psychological violence, and lack of information on how to deal with them are often a cause of stress and depression and leave teenagers exposed and vulnerable. Schools, which should provide the necessary information to protect young people from these risks are seldom prepared and instead face the challenge of high drop-out rates. The generational gap between students and their teachers and parents is so great that communication and information flow is often stalled and an expert intermediary to provide psycho-social services becomes necessary.



With support from Partners-Albania, the *Association of Young Researchers for Social Sciences* designed a pilot program introducing professional psychologists and social workers to five high schools in Tirana. Through information sessions, seminars, and roundtables, the Association provided a platform for students, teachers and parents to express opinions, exchange ideas and learn about the benefits of this new service.

As part of the pilot program psychologists organized focus groups, seminars, group and individual counseling sessions and peer education trainings, which all together reached 6,000 youngsters. Topics covered reflected the interests of the students as expressed in surveys which preceded the launching of the project and included: drug and other substance abuse problems, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, eating disorders, gender issues, generational gaps, stress and techniques to deal with it, and communication. Additionally, around 140 teachers and 300 parents have been exposed to information sessions related to the problems faced by adolescents.

The new service was received very enthusiastically by students and teachers alike in all five schools. The project prompted the publication of student newsletters and bulletins in the schools to spread information relevant to adolescents. At the end of the project a roundtable was organized to assess the impact of this undertaking. Participants included students, teachers, parents, government officials, members of the Social Sciences Faculty of the University of Tirana, youth parliamentarians, social workers and psychologists. It was agreed that the presence of a social worker and psychologist was highly beneficial for students and helped them overcome daily problems and conflicts.

A similar program was conducted by *the Albanian Institute for Social and Psychological Studies (AISPS)*, also supported by Partners-Albania. AISPS is a local NPO which provides psycho-social services to elementary schools in Tirana. Both Associations have lobbied the Albanian education authorities to pass a new law which includes the position of a social worker and a psychologist as an indispensable part of the staff of elementary and high schools. As a result of these joint efforts the new law was passed in the summer of 2004. Social workers and psychologists, who started their services in Tirana's schools under Partners-Albania's grant, will now permanently join the staff of the schools under the requirements of the new law. The success of this project was publicized through the national media, including coverage on major TV channels and newspapers. The initiative has also drawn the attention of other donors. ICCO (Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation) will be funding these new posts for the upcoming academic year.



Children celebrating New Year in the Day Center

## Community Center in Bathore

### *Women for Global Action*

For the past ten years, internal migration has been one of the most dramatic consequences of Albania's transition to democracy. The migration has overwhelmed many communities with infrastructural and social challenges. Bathore, the most marginalized and poverty-stricken suburb of Tirana, is one of the regions experiencing such challenges. Its 30,000 inhabitants recently migrated from the northeastern part of Albania, an underdeveloped region of the country where infrastructure and social services are practically non-existent. The migrants typically possess a very low level of education and job skills. In addition to their inherited challenges (unemployment, social economic problems, extended families, etc.), they are faced with basic problems such as lack of drinking water, sewage system and electricity. Social and educational services in Bathore are very limited as well. The area houses only one public school and a kindergarten, and lacks general and specialized medical services for women.

Bathore is home to approximately 12,000 women and girls over 16 years old, 99% of whom are unemployed. Among them only 7% completed tertiary education; 19% completed high school, and 60% finished elementary education. Many migrant women have been and still are victims of a traditional perception that considers them inferior and dependent on their husbands and family.

*Women for Global Action*, an Albanian NPO, received a grant from Partners-Albania to expand the services of its Community Center in Bathore and to solicit local government's support for the Center's services. Core activities of the Center target women and children – two of the most vulnerable groups of this impoverished migrant community - and consist of education services for preschool children, medical and counseling services for women, and integration and rehabilitation services for the community. Partners-Albania worked with Women for Global Action to develop a client filing protocol and an internal organization system to help the organization achieve greater impact and track the results of its work.

Implementation of the grant led to successful developments such as:

- *Collaboration with the local municipality:* the municipal government agreed to provide free space for the Community Center, pledged financial support to the existing kindergarten and became involved in organizing various community actions and meetings. The major outcome of this collaboration was addressing the electricity problem in Bathore.
- *Designing an inclusive strategy to distribute social services in Bathore:* Women for Global Action invited representatives of the community, local government, administrative unit, and the civil society sector, as well as experts and representatives of the Social Science University to participate in the design and implementation of the strategy. The strategy aims at identifying existing social services, providing a deeper

understanding of causes and effects of the poverty on people in the area, and pointing to the gaps that new services will need to address.

- *Ensuring school enrollment for community children:* 28 children who finished pre-school attendance at the Community Center and enrolled in the first-grade elementary school program were significantly better prepared for school. The communicative and behavioral patterns of their interaction with other children, as well as their level of general knowledge, have improved compared with other children who did not attend the pre-school.

As a result of the grant and trainings provided by Partners-Albania, Women for Global Action became a strong and self-sustainable organization whose services continue to improve the lives of women and children of Bathore. The organization's credibility and image have significantly improved. Several large donors including the World Bank agreed to support the operations of the Center based on the excellent results they demonstrated in Bathore. The organization was also recently selected by the World Bank as one of the beneficiaries of its social service credit scheme. For the next five years, Women for Global Action will cooperate with the local government towards improvement of the Community Center's premises and upgrading of the services.

Since the establishment of the Center, women in Bathore have felt freer and more encouraged to utilize its services, thus overcoming various barriers imposed on them by the traditional mentality. Over 500 community members have used the services of the Center to date and about 50 women have received health services (especially gynecological counseling) from the Center on a regular basis. Successes of the Center led to collaboration with two other women's NPOs: Albanian Family Planning and Women Advocacy Center, who agreed to convene informative meetings on health issues and provide pro bono legal advice for women in the community.





Children in their math class



Pre-school group in the leisure time

## Day Care Center for Children and Counseling Center for Women

### *Young Women Christian Association*

Through its financial and technical assistance to the *Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)*, Partners-Albania contributed to the establishment of a model Day Care Center for children in Tirana. The Day Care is part of an integrated Center that offers both educational programs for children (kindergarten), as well as childcare training, child development counseling and job placement for women and girls who have received childcare training. Since its inception, the Center has served over 200 women and children and provided permanent employment opportunities for 17 young women.

Following a series of trainings and technical assistance sessions for the organization's management and Board of Directors on financial management, project monitoring and evaluation, and internal procedures offered by Partners-Albania, the organization adopted a financial management system based on international accounting and transparency standards. This allowed the YWCA to obtain additional funding for their services from other donors such as the EU, ICCO (Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation), and Open Society Foundation Albania. Additionally, the organization has been successful in supporting its long-term sustainability through income from childcare fees paid by parents, fees from the training services, and fees from employment services.

The YWCA has actively cooperated with other organizations. They have provided childcare training courses for members and leadership training for the Board of Directors of Women for Global Action. Further, long term agreements have been made with the International Organization for Migration to provide trainings in childcare and development for young female victims of trafficking.

“PA’s trainings provide an interactive approach b/sed on open communication and collaboration; their careful monitoring and reporting of the impact of their programs is impressive, especially in the Northern part of the country, which is so difficult.”

– Etleva Qinami, Program Officer (CIDA)

## After School Programs for Children and Youth in Northern Albania

### “Venerin” Youth Center

Gjader, a marginalized and poverty-stricken suburb of Lezha in northern Albania, faces basic challenges such as the lack of drinking water, sewage system, electricity and infrastructure. Unemployment, migration, illegal trafficking and violence are still common problems affecting particularly children and youth, and which cause frequent school-drop-outs and a pervasive low level of education and life skills.

Through its financial support to the “Venerin” Youth Center, Partners – Albania helped to strengthen and expand after-school services for children and teenagers in Gjader, especially those who perform poorly academically and who receive little or no support from their parents. During the 12-month project, 80 children aged 6-12 and 100 teenagers aged 13-18 participated in a variety of after-school activities including sports, foreign language courses, dance and music classes, and discussion groups. Sixty children received regular assistance with their school work.

Teenagers were encouraged to become part of an “Ambassadors of Peace” project, which focused on promoting a culture of peace and tolerance in the community. They organized important activities involving all villagers, such as theater performances on critical issues and problems facing the village. This made the teenagers more sensitive to existing problems, helped break their indifference, and encouraged them to see other opportunities for a good future apart from emigration. They published a monthly community newspaper with critical facts and stories from the village in order to increase people’s awareness on the need for peace, tolerance and integration.

The project has encouraged children and youth, especially young girls, to become active and involved in their communities. The project has also reduced the risk of youth becoming victims of illegal trafficking or engaging in criminal activity. The teachers of the Gjader public school have given positive feedback regarding the impact that the after-school activities have had on the children and youth’s overall preparation for school classes.

As a community and volunteer organization, prior to receiving funding support from Partners – Albania, the Center had never managed any grants on its own. The grant and trainings provided by Partners – Albania not only strengthened the institutional and financial capacity of the Center, but also made it possible for the children and youth of Gjader to participate in Center activities on a daily basis.

## Information and Learning Center for Youth in Vlore

### *Youth Center in Vlore*

Since 1998, the *Youth Center in Vlore* has provided quality services for young people who are looking for jobs and developing their professional skills. The Youth Center received financial and technical assistance from Partners – Albania in order to strengthen the organization and transform it into a permanent social observatory, gathering current trends among youth and providing services in response to the recorded needs.

Since the start of the project the Center has extended its services to over 2,500 young people from Vlore. The youth between the ages of 15 and 22 were offered computer, language, photography, finance and accounting courses and more. The Center also offered help in preparing CVs and getting ready for job interviews. By establishing contacts with various private companies in the area, the Center gathered information about job vacancies and made them available to the youth looking for employment. As a result, 40 young people were employed in different private companies and governmental institutions.

After establishing a good relationship with the local government as well as local private companies and non-governmental organizations, the Center began to be recognized as one of the main resources contributing to policy changes related to youth issues. Most recently, the Youth Center advocated for creating a youth commission in the municipality of Vlora in order to improve youth's participation in policy making at the local level.



## B. Disability

### Employment and Support Services for Persons with Disabilities in Albania

*Albanian Disability Rights Foundation*



Wheelchair users employed in the Miresia workshop, build mobility means for other people in need



The disabled in Albania face many barriers to their integration and active participation in society. The fall of communism in 1991 found them unprepared to adjust to a new system and way of living. Sixty percent of the disabled in Albania live below the poverty level, and many lack general mobility means, leaving them with no access to general services. The lack of government subsidies, specialized medical care and legal support has led to their further isolation and marginalization. Additionally, a general deficiency of information about disability and its causes, as well as wide-spread ignorance about the issue leads to frequent treatment of the disabled as a burden to the society. A recent study showed that there is a need for more than 7,000 wheelchairs in Albania.

*The Albanian Disability Rights Foundation* (ADRIF), an NPO devoted to promoting the rights and expanding services for the disabled, is currently the only producer and distributor of wheelchairs in Albania. In 2003 and 2004, Partners – Albania funded two projects implemented by the Foundation which aimed to provide employment and support services for people with disabilities. Over 300 disabled benefited from assistance and services offered by ADRIF as a result of these efforts. The Foundation provided education for persons with disabilities about their employment rights, helped them find jobs and created mobility means for people in need.

Additionally, ADRIF's efforts led to several large scale developments towards inclusion and integration of the disabled in Albania. These include:

- ADRIF successfully lobbied The Ministry of Labor to subsidize wheelchair production. A Subsidizing Unit was set up for the first time as a result these efforts;
- ADRIF contributed to the enforcement of the approval of the law on accessibility, the approval of amendments to the law on the right to inclusive education, and partial approval of recommendations ensuring the rights of the disabled to participate in the election process;
- ADRIF coordinated efforts for the establishment of a cross-ministerial working and full involvement of disability NPOs in the process of defining the National Disability Strategy. The strategy was finalized in December 2003 and efforts are currently underway to make it fully operational;
- ADRIF succeeded in soliciting financial support for the disabled from private companies and corporations such as Vodafone, Coca-Cola, and Glina;
- Finally, ADRIF contributed to the passing of an urban planning regulation that sets accessibility standards for public spaces (public building and sidewalk ramps, apartment building entrances, etc.).

The Foundation's successful implementation of the project funded by Partners – Albania drew attention and interest of other donors in supporting the organization's initiatives. ADRIF is now planning to build a factory for the production of wheelchairs and other accessories with support from a Dutch funder. The organization is one of the first Albanian NPOs working to improve the quality of life for thousands of disabled people all over Albania.

## C. Democracy and Good Governance

### Promoting Democratic Elections

#### *Society for Democratic Culture*

Through its funding support for the *Society for Democratic Culture (SDC)*, an Albanian NPO, Partners – Albania contributed to encouraging Albanian citizens' participation in the October 2003 local elections and their trust in free and fair election processes as one of the cornerstones of a democratic society. SDC has been monitoring local elections in Albania since its inception in 1992. However, until the October 2003 elections, it has never been fully capable of providing coverage to 100% of polling stations.

The project supported by Partners – Albania consisted of monitoring the October 2003 local elections in 12 prefectures of Albania (Tirana, Shkoder, Kukes, Lezhe, Diber, Durres, Elbasan, Berat, Korce, Fier, Vlore and Gjirokaster) by independent observers coordinated by SDC, organizing meetings with local governments and communities, and facilitating open debates in preparation for the elections.

During the project, SDC established contacts with political parties, the Central Election Commission, and the Local Government Election Center (LGEC) in order to have an overview of the revised registered voters' list prior to the elections and the preparatory work of the Voting Center Commission.

SDC recruited over 1,000 independent observers who received training organized by the Albanian Institute for Election Systems on the electoral code, the legal procedures of the Voting Center Commission and LGEC activity, code of ethics of the observer, and behavior of the observer in polling stations.

On Election Day, the observers monitored the voting process in 30 districts and 12 prefectures. Twelve mobile teams comprised of local coordinators and regional coordinators observed the voting process by visiting the polling stations of each prefecture and staying in contact with field observers on the ongoing process of the voting. Following the elections, SDC recorded its findings in a comprehensive report and publicized them during two press conferences.

This was the first time that the local elections in Albania were fully monitored by independent local observers and results from the process were reported and shared with the public through the local and national media. The election monitoring actions initiated by SDC and other civil society organizations have had an immediate impact on politicians, who are becoming more aware of their role and impact on the society. This success testifies to an improved image of civil society in Albania and greater social coherence. Most importantly, it has led to a new image of Albanian civil society helping to shake off the apathy of the Albanian public and injecting a greater demand for democracy, accountable politics and responsible public services.



One person, one vote!





"Stop Import of Urban Waste"

“Working with PA was a very positive experience for us as recipients of their grants. The grant program, accompanied by capacity building trainings for grantees, was very well prepared, organized and managed.”

– Kreshnik Spahiu, Director, Citizens Advocacy Office

## Mobile Campaign to Fight Corruption and Human Trafficking

### *Citizens Advocacy Office*

Both corruption and trafficking in human beings are serious problems in Albania. According to Transparency International's 2003 Corruption Perceptions Index, Albania's corruption problem was ranked 2.5 on the scale 10-0 (10 non-corrupt, 0 – highly corrupt). Albania is an origin country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor, mostly to Greece and Italy, and to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands. Children, especially from the Roma and Egyptian communities, are trafficked internationally for forced begging.

As part of its NPO support activities, Partners – Albania provided financial and training assistance for the *Citizens Advocacy Office (CAO)*, an Albanian NPO working to fight corruption and trafficking. Partners – Albania supported the efforts of the organization to sensitize the Albanians about the necessity to be more proactive in fighting both problems and report incidents of injustice.

Over a seven-month period (September 03 – May 04) CAO organized a nation-wide campaign during which it visited 10 different municipalities and conducted activities with citizens to address corruption and trafficking issues. Working for seven days in each location, CAO met with citizens and offered pro-bono legal advice to people who have been victims of corruption, power abuse, family violence or trafficking.

In each place it visited, CAO established cooperation with local organizations focusing on fighting corruption and trafficking. Contacts were also made with local police, lawyers, and justice system representatives who were invited to participate in open public debates on corruption and trafficking cases particular to the municipalities visited. Cooperating with the local media, CAO succeeded in airing many of its public debates on corruption as well as publishing daily stories on victims of human trafficking in Albania. Further, CAO organized seminars and discussions in schools and universities focused on raising young people's awareness about the risks of trafficking.

CAO spearheaded advocacy against the lack of transparency demonstrated by Albanian public utility companies. Following complaints of hundreds of citizens, the CAO initiated legal action against the decision of Albtelecom, one of the largest telecommunication companies in Albania, to increase charges for domestic subscribers without notice. CAO mobilized the citizens to support a legal battle for the repeal or revocation of this illegal and arbitrary decision by publicizing all the violations of the law by Albtelecom through written and electronic media. In January 2004, the CAO protest led to innovative forms of public dissent such as the call for not-using the landline telephones for a whole month. Further, CAO initiated a call to switch the lights off all over Albania for 10 minutes on a Sunday as signs of citizens' indignation against the lack of transparency and management irregularities of these public utilities.

By involving all actors from the community in the effort to bring corruption and trafficking injustice to light, CAO succeeded in pointing out the roles and responsibilities of all community members in fighting the violence, crime and trafficking which prevail in the society. The campaign was an attempt to restore confidence inside the communities that the problems can be eradicated if they are noticed, reported and acted on by both citizens and government authorities. The actions undertaken by CAO facilitated the increased involvement of Albanian civil society organizations in influencing public awareness and encouraging citizens to voice their concerns and problems through non-partisan public protests.

### Introducing Mediation in Northern Albania

#### *The Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes*

Malesi e Madhe is one of the poorest and most isolated areas of Albania, located in the northern, mountainous part of the country. Inter-personal and inter-group conflicts, especially family and property disputes, are very frequent and until recently they were resolved through traditional means often relying on the ancient Kanun Law, which allows for blood revenges and vendettas among families.

The *Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR)* has been making a difference in Malesi e Madhe communities by introducing mediation as an alternative means of resolving conflicts between and among people. With a grant from Partners – Albania, the Foundation started a community-based mediation center and raised community awareness about the mediation process through TV and radio debates, leaflets and other materials distributed to community members.

The Foundation worked with local authorities including municipal government, police, judicial officers, and local boards of education to garner support for its work. For the first time, these different authorities joined the effort of establishing community mediation as an alternative method of conflict resolution.

During the nine-month project, 97 cases were referred to the Center and 98% were successfully resolved by the twelve mediators trained by the Foundation. Case referrals came from community members (66%), the police (16%), local authorities (13%) and schools (5%). Most mediations dealt with property disputes but many others involved family, criminal, contractual and civil cases. It is estimated that during the nine month project, about 450 people benefited from the services of the mediation center.

Overall, the Foundation contributed to an increased awareness of peaceful conflict resolution processes as the bases for social peace while resolving close to 100 community conflicts in Malesi e Madhe. The organization plans to expand its services to reach even more people in the future.



Making harmony and peace, part of a community discussion



Preparing an action plan for a better management of forests and pastures



Community members rehabilitating the stream by constructing a stonewall dam

## D. Environment

### Communal Forests and Pastures Management in Northern Albania

#### *The Communal Forests and Pastures Federation*

Since the socio-political changes that took place in Albania in 1991, the Government of Albania has approved laws that allow communes and communities to manage forests and pastures as part of the larger decentralization process. Many local communities have created Forest and Pasture User's Associations to make better decisions about the management of natural resources. However, the actual communal forestry policy is still centralized and the rights of forest users are not clearly defined.

*The Communal Forests and Pastures Federation* is an organization made up of 19 Forest Users' Associations (FUAs) and 13 communes in Diber Quarku, Northern Albania. Thanks to two consecutive grants from Partners – Albania – first grants that the Federation ever managed on its own – the Federation worked to raise awareness about the importance of communal forestry in local villages and to design a strategic plan for natural resource management in the Diber area. Numerous meetings and workshops conducted by the Federation with diverse stakeholders in local villages helped the community members and local government authorities realize that better cooperation between communes, FUAs and communities will lead to better management of forests and the natural resources that come from them. As a result, village commissions were established for better management and decision-making for communal forestry. In the communes of Sllove and Gjorice the meetings resulted in the appointment of forest guides, which had never been done before.

Based on different agreements and recommendations that arose after the communities and local authorities mobilized and discussed the issue, the Federation drafted a Resolution requesting a more active role for FUAs and communes in order to achieve sustainable management. The Resolution was sent to the Directorate General of Forests and Pastures and other national institutions dealing with environmental issues and opened a debate on this issue at a national level.

As a result of this project, the public image of the Federation has improved and its membership expanded by two additional communes. The Federation plans to continue its lobbying efforts with the national government to advocate for further decentralization of communal forestry policies.



## E. Business

### Improving the Economic Status of Rural Women in Tirana and Durres

#### *Small Business Foundation*



Women trainees visiting a local dairy enterprise



Women from Rubjekë in a training session

In the rural areas of Albania where unemployment rates are soaring, single-family income is often less than 1 USD per day - the poverty level according to the U.N. standards. Unofficial sources say that rural Albanian family income is five times smaller than that of an urban family. Since the fall of communism, women in particular have been affected by the rapid decrease of work opportunities, health care, education system and low family incomes, and their poor economic situation has caused the deterioration of their social status. During the political and economic transition of the country, many rural women lost their jobs in agriculture cooperatives or state-run enterprises. Their husbands were often left without a stable workplace or decided to look for better opportunities abroad.

*The Small Business Foundation* received a grant from Partners – Albania to improve the economic status of women in rural Albania. The activities under this grant consisted of training 160 women from rural areas around Tirana and Durres. The trainings aimed at developing entrepreneurial skills of participants; informing them about basic, effective and efficient farm business management; providing knowledge on loan applications at micro credit institutions; seeking professional advice on business management, preparation of business plans, successful planning of selling products, etc. The trainings were followed by a consultation on bank loan applications and business plan preparation.

The Small Business Foundation delivered eight training blocks in four rural areas of Maminas, Berxulle, Farka and Baldushku (Tirana and Durres regions) for a total of 160 women. Success of the trainings became quickly apparent: 25 out of 30 women who received technical assistance in business plan preparation and loan application obtained small credits for the following purposes:

- The Credit Union Association (CUAM) granted credits to five women farmers from Rubjeke (2 for cow purchase, 1 for flower green house, 2 for bar-restaurant), four women from Karrec (3 for tailoring services, 1 for green house) and three women from Berxulle (2 for vineyard, 1 for flower green house)
- The Rural Financing Fund granted a working capital loan to a woman farmer from Valshaj for the export of dried beans to Italy
- The Livestock Entrepreneurs Association of Albania (LEAA) credited six women farmers from Valshaj and Berxulle (cow purchases)
- Six women created an Association in Farka, which requested a loan from the For the Future Foundation to start new vineyards

Support of Partners – Albania to the Small Business Foundation helped many rural women develop their business and entrepreneurship skills and enabled them to access micro-credits from lending institutions. This is an extremely important step in empowering rural women to fight poverty by starting their own businesses as well as overcoming the stereotypes persistent in the Albanian society that men are the main bread winners of their families.

## II. LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAM

*Over the past three years, Partners – Albania has worked with municipal representatives to enhance their leadership and management skills, and to increase citizen participation in local government and decision making. These programs have emphasized the interaction of all sectors and social groups (civic, municipal, and private) to cooperatively address concrete issues such as housing, unemployment, education and social services. Trainings for municipal officials offered by Partners – Albania include: Elected Leadership Roles, Communication and Outreach Skills, Conflict Management Skills, Transparency and Accountability.*

*Programs targeting local governments contribute to the increased understanding of public officials of their role in involving citizens in the process of decentralization. The following success story reflects this trend, which is so important to the process of decentralization and democratization in Albania.*



The presentation on the Citizens Information Offices at the Pogradec Municipality



The Albanian delegation visiting the Struga Municipality

### Fostering Communication and Outreach Skills through Experience Exchange among Bordering Communities

In May – August 2004, Partners – Albania in cooperation with OPEN, an NPO from Macedonia, designed and implemented a joint project aiming to strengthen the communication and outreach skills of municipal officials of four neighboring municipalities from Albania and Macedonia. The participating municipalities included respectively: Pogradec (Albania) - Struga (Macedonia); and Peshkopi (Albania) – Debar (Macedonia).

The project, titled “Fostering Communication and Outreach Skills through Experience Exchange among Bordering Communities” consisted of four workshops (two in each country) on the role of the CICs and four visits to participating cities to facilitate exchange of experiences with the operation of the Centers. During the project, municipal officials from all four communities learned about new, advanced tools for communicating effectively with constituents, developing efficient means of improving public services, and engaging citizens in participatory governance.

A total of 12 officials working at the Citizens Information Centers in the four bordering municipalities were given the chance to exchange their experiences on the functioning of their Centers with colleagues from neighboring communities. Representatives of public administration of the four municipalities, local NPOs, and media (a total of around 120 participants) also participated in the workshops and site visits.

Representatives of local NPOs shared their experiences on their relationship with local government, access to information from public officials, and their presence and involvement in local policy formulation.

“*The project strengthened the links for future cooperation among bordering municipalities, helped us to learn new models and practices for better participatory governance.*”

-Mr. Imer Ollgu, Mayor of Debar,  
FYR of Macedonia

The project resulted in the following successful developments:

- The interest and the will shown by senior authorities of the four municipalities/communes (each municipality group was headed by the mayor) proved the need for bordering communities to exchange their best practices on dealing with the constraints and obstacles CICs face, and the lack of infrastructure and financial resources for better services.
- Bordering municipalities exchanged experiences on how to promote internal & external communication of municipalities/communes with local actors of civil society and the business sector, and the importance of citizen's role in local governance.
- Participating communities in both Macedonia and Albania agreed that CICs and local NPOs can work together to educate the public and the local government officials about the new legal framework of FOI (Freedom of Information) laws.
- CIC staff of the four municipalities developed strategies for working with the media to raise the awareness of citizens of their rights to Access to Information, the importance of implementation of Freedom of Information Laws, and the establishment and promotion of different information channels.
- Macedonian CICs shared their successful national networking experience with their Albanian colleagues. The Albanian municipalities are now considering networking their CICs in order to better disseminate best practices and lessons learned among themselves.



The closing ceremony of the Youth Leadership Program

“  
Participating in the Youth Leadership Program helped me learn how to be a good leader, how to be more tolerant and flexible within a team, how to accept others' opinions in conflict situations and to develop effective listening skills. I successfully implemented the gained knowledge in my work environment, being a good leader of a youth political group.”  
– Denis Dervishi,  
Democratic Youth Forum, Durrës

### III. LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

#### A. Youth Leadership Program

*The Youth Leadership Program aims to develop young professionals working for NPOs, local and national government, business and other sectors in Albania in order to develop their leadership potentials and skills necessary to work collaboratively in multiparty situations.*

*Over the 17 months of program duration to date, Partners – Albania trained 150 participants representing emerging young leaders from different regions of Albania. A series of leadership trainings focused on building the following skills of the participants: team building, networking and coalition building, leadership and communication, conflict management, negotiation, mediation, fundraising (resource mobilization), and project implementation. About 50 of the most active and successful participants in the program were trained as trainers and given the opportunity to design and implement local initiatives with funding from Partners – Albania.*

*The success of the Youth Leadership Program is visible in the enthusiasm of the young participants about their involvement in implementing the small projects, working with other young people as a team, and developing their skills as future leaders.*

#### Youth-Led Revival of School Libraries in Tirana

The upheavals following the end of the communist regime in Albania left many of Tirana's high schools with a profound financial crisis which has not allowed them to improve the services they offer to students beyond the bare minimum. Internal migration and the influx of new students from rural to urban areas have made it additionally difficult for schools to maintain the quality of services they provide.

Several young leaders from Tirana recently designed a project to help one of the high schools improve the functional capacity of its library by updating the cataloguing system and enhancing its book collection. They believed this would encourage high school students to read more and to use the school library facilities as a resource in their studies. Ismail Qemali High School, which serves several thousand of Tirana's youth, was identified as the school whose library was in the greatest need of updating. The majority of its books were purchased in the 1970s and its cataloguing system was practically non-existent.

The young leaders are a part of a Youth Leadership Program, an on-going initiative coordinated by Partners – Albania–Center for Change and Conflict Management. Having received a series of trainings in cooperation and network building provided by Partners – Albania, the team of young leaders organized round-tables with teachers, parents and students of the Ismail Qemali high school, as well as with representatives of local publishing houses





The working group planning the initiative

“The Youth Leadership Program was an interesting, useful and applicable experience. It helped me improve my managerial and leadership style in leading my organization.”

– Rogert Zikaj, Albanian Youth-Shakers



Celebrating on the International Roma Day

and famous writers. The meetings served to explain the aim of the project and the long-term benefits it would bring to the students and the school. Through discussions and negotiations, the young leaders succeeded in convincing all stakeholders that their support and involvement in the initiative would increase student interest in reading and make the library a more accessible and user-friendly resource.

The project team negotiated discounted book rates with local publishing houses and purchased a number of new books for the school with a small grant from Partners – Albania. The young leaders are currently working with the school to restructure the library’s cataloguing system and to install a new database for keeping records on the existing book collection.

It is hoped that the success of the project in Ismail Qemali High School will encourage other schools to undertake similar initiatives. Upon project completion, the young leaders plan to share the success of this project with other schools, publishing houses and the government of the municipality of Tirana to encourage their involvement in reviving school facilities for the benefit of future generations of Tirana’s students.

## Youth Festival Day for the Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Durres

Ethnic minorities in Albania, especially the Roma and Egyptians, are very isolated and not widely accepted in Albanian society. This situation is especially difficult for children and youth who are particularly sensitive to rejection by their peers. To address this problem, participants in Partners – Albania’s Youth Leadership Program organized a Youth Festival Day in Durres during which youth representing various ethnic groups participated in a variety of cultural activities, designed to bridge the gap between them.

The festival was organized on the International Roma Day in the Palace of Culture in Durres. Participants in the event included young people aged 15 to 22 and represented different groups from the Albanian society. The message “Stop stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice against minorities and vulnerable groups; Help to integrate and unite all in a civil society” was transmitted to the audience through a show which featured songs and dancing by different minorities, role-plays, and interviews and open discussion with leaders of NPOs working on the protection of rights of these communities.

Participants in Partners – Albania’s Youth Leadership Program who planned and coordinated the event were extremely enthusiastic about the wide interest from youth and their engagement in all the activities. The initiative allowed young people from different backgrounds and social groups to feel part of one community. Many of them exchanged contacts and started new friendships during that day. The effort, headed by youth and for youth, stressed the importance of helping young Albanians to increase knowledge and understanding of each other’s differences and similarities, common cultural background and the everyday problems they face.



The group of women participants in the Women Leadership Program

## B. Women's Leadership Program

*The Women's Leadership Program (WLP) aims to develop the leadership, communication and organizational skills of women's groups in Albania, particularly those located outside the capital. The program aims to enhance the women's abilities to communicate, negotiate, advocate, collaborate, problem-solve, and utilize their leadership skills in support of their goals.*

*To date, P-A trained 18 women as trainers and provided them with knowledge, information and skills on: becoming an effective trainer, project management and communication, conflict management and team building, leadership and management, advocacy and lobbying, establishing alliances, and networking. Following these sessions, participants implemented local initiatives in the communities where they live and work, focusing mainly on increased participation of women in local decision making, promotion of women candidates in local elections, helping women start their small businesses, introducing the standards of the New Family Code, strengthening the role of women in improving ethnic relations in selected regions of Albania, etc. As a result, about 800 women were trained by the 18 participants in the Women's Leadership Program.*

### Increasing Women's Involvement in the 2003 Local Elections

In the municipalities of Fier and Vlora, a group of women leaders participating in Partners – Albania's Women's Leadership Program coordinated a campaign to encourage women to cast their votes in the October 2003 elections and inform the community about the electoral candidates, including women candidates.

As part of the campaign, interviews were conducted with a total of 93 women candidates representing different political parties (Socialist Party, Democratic Party, Balli Kombetar, Republican Party, Social Democratic Party, New Democratic Party, and Party for Human Rights); roundtable discussions with women candidates were organized and focused on their role in decision making. Women leaders negotiated with targeted party members and district council members requesting that the identified women candidates be put on the campaign lists of the appropriate parties. A total of 400 families received information about women candidates and all public and private institutions from the two municipalities received candidate information via e-mail/phone or mail.

The project contributed to changing the mentality of Fier and Vlora community members about women's participation in political life. A survey which the women leaders conducted following the local elections with 40 randomly chosen interviewees reported a common opinion that women candidates

“The training offered by PA was the first training offered by an Albanian organization in Albanian, with Albanian materials and relevant to the local context.”

– Yldize Brahimi  
(Women's Leadership Program)

should be elected not just out of respect for the normative actions and political correctness but for their abilities and skills. Articles covering women's participation in the election process were featured in the local newspapers.

### Changing the View of Women's Role in the Albanian Family

Albanian society is still predominantly patriarchal, especially in the Northern part of the country. The social position of a woman is especially weak and vulnerable. Women are not actively involved in public life and their voices are seldom heard by the male dominated society. There are many difficult issues that women continue to face in their families such as physical and sexual abuse, restrictions on girls' education resulting in low employment opportunities later in life, and consequences of blood feuds that frequently occur among families.

One of the participants in the Women Leadership Program, coordinated by Partners – Albania, received support from the Department of Education and the Albanian Council of Ministers to organize a public debate on the issues that Albanian women face in their families. The debate was organized in the city of Tropoja, one of the poorest and most conservative regions in the northern part of the country. Forty participants, representing different members of the community – both men and women – agreed to take part in the open discussion which was aired on a local TV channel. The debate was very heated and challenging and most men openly opposed the idea that women should be afforded more opportunities and a more independent lifestyle. Even though they were in a difficult position and many were not outspoken, women participants, with the help of the discussion facilitator, were able to assert themselves and express many of their concerns.

Raising the general public's awareness of these issues was the goal of the initiative and making a debate like this public was a first step in changing the traditional attitudes towards women that remain an obstacle to creating a democratic and equal society in Albania. When the debate was over, many of the men admitted that they favored the idea of empowering women, but they did not want to publicly show their support. Through the debate, an unmet demand for leadership and management trainings for Tropoja women was discovered. Women participants expressed great interest in such trainings to enable them to start their own businesses and get more involved in the decision making of the community. Partners – Albania plans to address these needs by further working with the women leaders who participate in the Women Leadership Program.



Women Leadership Program initiative covered by local media