


Swiss-Ukrainian project
DESPRO
Decentralization Support in Ukraine

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DESPRO'S SCHOOL OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE



DESPRO
LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE
SCHOOL

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The Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project DESPRO is an international assistance project working in the reform of local self-governance (or “decentralization”) in Ukraine. DESPRO is funded by the Swiss Confederation via the Swiss Cooperation Office and implemented by Skat, and has been active since 2007.

1

Introduction



Ukraine’s decentralization reform was launched with the forming of a new government in late February 2014. By April 2014, a roadmap of local self-government reform was adopted by the government¹. This roadmap provided preconditions, objectives, steps, timeframe and foreseen results of the decentralisation reform in the country through the delegation of power and resources from the central to the local level. It established the three-tiers of local government in the country: the region (*oblast*); the district (*rayon*); and the community/municipality (*hromada*). The roadmap became a milestone for political and fiscal decentralisation and framed all necessary legislative changes to be developed, including the law “On Cooperation of Territorial Communities” (which set conditions for intermunicipal cooperation) and the Law “on Voluntary Amalgamation of territorial

Communities” (which established the new administrative and territorial set-up as well as new managerial approaches).

As a result of such tremendous changes, local self-government representatives required assistance in strengthening their capacities on the specificities of the reform, new legislation, and local governments’ responsibilities and functions.

In response, DESPRO developed and launched an integrated Training Programme, called “Local Self-Governance School” (LSG School) in 2014. The programme foresees two phases of weekly face-to-face trainings with an online course in-between. It addresses topics such as local self-governance (LSG) reform, decentralization, best practices (domestic and international) on decentralisation, practical issues related

¹ “Concept of Reforming Local Self-governance and Territorial Set-Up of Power” (dated 1 April, 2014 # 333-p).

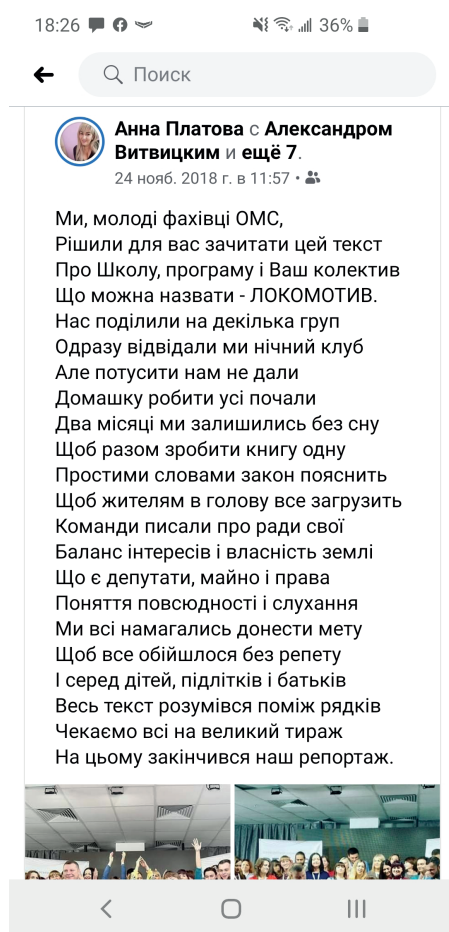
to organizational and legal changes as a result of the reforms, as well as development of knowledge and capacities for personal

leadership and communications skills. The best participants undergo training of trainers (ToT) and later teach in the LSG School.

2 Achievements (2014-2020)

Since 2014, the LSG School has developed and implemented 55 training modules covering topics such as: strategic planning, marketing of territories, local economic development, local financial resources and investments attraction, interpersonal and external communications, community-building and social cohesion, land regulations and spatial planning, branding of territories and e-governance, intermunicipal cooperation and participatory decision-making.

Since 2014, DESPRO has conducted 7 LSG Schools with 445 graduates (271 women and 174 men), representing 89 amalgamated



* Feedback from participants of LSG School on social media

communities, and 110 certified trainers (58 women and 52 men). Up to 15 professional trainers have been selected and constantly engaged into the School since its launch.

3 Process/Methodology

Up to 90 participants enroll in the LSG School annually. Throughout the school's programme, the most active participants are identified and later undergo Training of Trainers (ToT). The new trainers then teach in the next round of the School and continue practicing their new skills in their day-to-day work. This approach forms the first steps for the sustainability of learning processes among local government representatives.

The selection of participants to the LSG School is done on the basis of the availability of a developed Community Development Strategy for the Amalgamated Territorial Community (ATC), as well as compliance with the selection criteria (motivation (35%), reputation (30%), eligibility (20%), and compliance of strategic documents with the set requirements (15%)). Admissions are made by a Commission on a competitive basis in order to select ATC teams for each LSG School's cycle.

All of the training topics of the School are focused around each ATC's strategy. In particular, attention is paid to whether strategies are realistic, feasible, up-to-date, locally bound and applicable in the concrete community. The School's modules are set so that each topic



Based on participants' feedback, the LSG School proved to be successful, useful and effective in building capacity and facilitating local development processes.



is applied to the strategies' tasks and goals, thereby enabling participants to update their strategies. In particular, strategies are updated through the following key activities:

- **Reformulation of the vision and mission of a community.** This part of the ATC's strategy is often written in a generalized manner, with no local identity or may be completely missing. The School's participants brainstorm with their strategic committees to make visions and missions more natural to the community;
- **Inclusion of social cohesion measures into the strategy.** This aspect helps to mobilize and engage community members in decision-making at the level of the community;
- **Market analysis** to highlight the strengths of the community to be further developed;
- Introducing branding specificities into the strategic document to attract investments for economic development;
- **Development of monitoring indicators**, since the majority of strategies lack such indicators completely or have poorly formulated them.

As a result:

- 100% of the strategies of the ATCs- participants of the School are updated,
- New community development projects are elaborated, and skills for effective project implementation developed,
- Concepts for introducing community branding are in place and widely discussed
- ATCs' organisational structures are revised
- The LSG School's participants network is enlarged by new members

In 2014, the school programme included informal discussions on the role of Local government associations, their membership advantages, changes to be performed to raise the standards and quality of services provided to members. As decentralization reform progressed, the curriculum of the LSG School underwent updates and changes.

For instance, in 2014, LSG School targeted three levels of local government representatives: 1) village heads; 2) rayon (district) heads; and 3) mayors of small towns. From 2017 onwards, the School was dedicated solely to representatives of Amalgamated Territorial Communities (ATCs), with more demand-driven training modules: two f2f sessions, an on-line training course and a Training of Trainers for the most active participants.

In 2018 the School's admission criteria was updated: DESPRO started to invite teams of up to 5 people from ATCs. The team composition should reflect the interests of different stakeholders and be led by an ATC's Head or Deputy Head. Team members could include strategic planning committees' members who are not purely representatives of local governments, such as Non-Government and Civil Society Organisations, communal enterprises, and private companies.

These changes were driven by increased demand for effective strategies that would engage and take into account the interests of all community members and be efficiently implemented. Communities had never experienced local development strategy preparation. Finding an approach that could unite different villages incorporated into a new amalgamated



community was even more of a challenge. The task of the community leader was to organise participatory strategic planning, leading to shared ownership, common decision-making and social cohesion for the community.

DESPRO also created a dedicated section of the school for young LSG specialists (under 35 years old). Every year, DESPRO received applications from ambitious young specialists with a request to open the LSG School for individual participation (not only ATC teams). Along with the amalgamation process, an increasing number of young people have come to work for local governments and require specific training in terms of professional knowledge and expertise. These young professionals want to be of use and bring changes in their communities.



(або Абетка простих поясень про складні речі)

After analyzing the situation, DESPRO decided to open a new “wing” of the LSG School to train young professionals and help build the capacity of future community leaders. In 2018, a group of young LSG specialists under the leadership of the School’s trainer produced a book “Caution! It is hot here” (ATC) or “The ABC of Simple Explanations on Complicated Issues”. The book explains the decentralisation reform in Ukraine with simple words to understand the principles of the reform and opportunities for local development. The publication is targeted towards everyone who wants to understand the reform that is still undergoing in Ukraine, in a simple language.

In 2019, we introduced a new feature of the LSG School through DESPRO’s collaboration with the NGO Casers. As part of this cooperation, DESPRO organised a “Case Championship”, whereby the ATC teams prepared their cases, describing problems and challenges they face as local self-government. These cases were then solved creatively and innovatively by any member of the public. During the first LSG School session, the



ATC teams developed and presented their cases, which were uploaded on the Championship web page². In total, 16 ATCs’ cases received 50 “solutions” from various stakeholders: universities, NGOs, LSG representatives, including LSG School’s participants and graduates from the previous years as well as young professionals. ATC teams selected the winning “solutions” for their cases, with the prize being a visit to the community with interesting excursions to the main places of interest.

4 Lessons learned

High graduation numbers are linked to the quality of applications: Usually, up to 30% of applicants are not accepted during the screening of applications for the LSG School. These rejections are explained by the stringent admission criteria



with high applications requirements and top motivation standards. The LSG School is a results-oriented programme, and the selection committee filters out participants who apply to numerous trainings for the sake of it with no intention of “self-development” and using new skills for community development. Hence, the number of participants who drop out of the trainings is quite low (on average 5 to 15%). Usually, the participants who have dropped out have failed to complete the e-course or missed f2f trainings.

Since the LSG School has been in high demand with a strong growth in the number of participants, it required more human resources to manage the programme efficiently. The success of the School is based not only on the DESPRO team’s efforts, but also experts who contribute

² <https://casers.org/cases/chemp-onat-keys-v-ob-dnanih-gromad-shkoli-despro>

to the agenda, assistants who provide technical support and PR department who supports every stage of the event planning and management.

A survey of recent graduates of the LSG School questionnaires showed that all respondents were ready to pay for capacity building of local government employees out of their own budgets. It proves that the LSG School may be able to turn into a financially sustainable training platform, beyond the project.

It is common practice among Ukrainian ATCs to contract external experts for the elaboration of

their local development strategies. Unfortunately, it may result in non-realistic documents that cannot be used by the community. DESPRO's methodology of strategic planning in conjunction with the LSG School training approach proved to be efficient and lead to sustainable local development processes as the participants benefited from social cohesion and capacity building. As they study in mixed groups, LSG School participants also work on increasing the level of trust between local self-government officials, the private sector and civil society.

Resources

1. "The ABC of Simple Explanations on Complicated Issues" <https://despro.org.ua/library/Oberezhno-Tut-Gariache.pdf>

DESPRO developed short videos on LSG School, its methodology, results and feedbacks from the participants:

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQLm4DwLelg>

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybjqEL7S0HA>

4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB_KwIKCrY

5. <https://despro.org.ua/news/detail.php?ID=1795>

