Egap program's impact stories : building a sustainable participatory policy making culture in ukraine

"eDemocracy is a continuous online dialogue between civil society, business and the government. Essentially, it is a search for consensus that goes beyond the basic political definition of citizens having opportunities to influence authorities."

- Business participant –
Open Mike for Policy Dialogues on eDemocracy Focus Groups

"It is futile for us to begin engaging citizens in decision making processes if we as public administrators and administrative system do not practice democracy inside our own system and procedures – such as having openaccess to state registers."

-Government participant-
Open Mike for Policy Dialogues on eDemocracy Focus Groups

The post-Soviet political legacy has left deep marks on the policy-making process in Ukraine. Policies in Ukraine tend to be developed behind closed doors where experts' or stakeholders' inputs are obscurely chosen and the public is rarely interactively consulted. Global practice shows that non-inclusive and intransparent approaches to policy making jeopardize policies' and subsequently governments' legitimacy, public buy-in and trust which then translates into disconnects and inefficiencies in policy implementation stages.

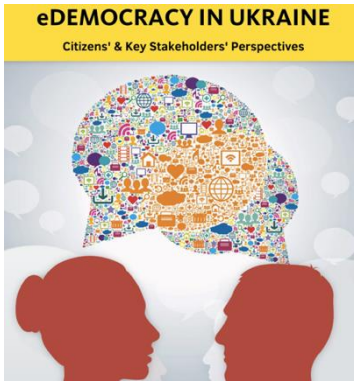
PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING AS OUR FOCUS

One of EGAP Program's objectives is to promote an inclusive, evidence-based and participatory approach to policy making at the national and regional level in Ukraine. EGAP's National Policy Dialogue Component therefore assists in the cultivation of a sustainable participatory culture by facilitating the inclusion of individuals or groups in the design of policies via consultative or participatory means to achieve accountability, transparency and active citizenship. As in reality policy making is often multi-dimensional and dynamic rather than linear, EGAP collaborates with multiple stakeholders and introduces various offline and innovative online instruments. We would like to share with one impactful case from our 'inclusive policy-making' practice where we EGAP started with one civil society and one government partner in 2015 to a coalition of over 20 CSOs and government partners in 2016 who jointly drafted a National Concept of E-democracy currently in the process of being adopted by the government.

EGAP's PARTICIPATORY & INCLUSIVE POLICY DIALOGUE INSTRUMENTS

- Policy Dialogue Round Tables
- Crowdsourced or our own Analytics/ Infographics
- Coalition building of like-mindeds
- Stakeholder Consultations
- Public Opinion Surveys
- Online Consultations
- E-polling
- Inter-regional Dialogues feeding into National, Parliamentary Dialogues

EGAP's IMPACT



In 2015, when the EGAP Program started, e-democracy was a new topic for Ukrainian politicians, for most civil society organizations, media and the greater public. The few active stakeholders in the area of e-democracy were fragmented and lacked a common agenda. Relevant legislation as well as robust, targeted, up-to-date analytics and documentation of best practices on e-democracy were also not available. This contributed to a rather low public and government's understanding about what e-democracy is and about its potential benefits. Our research also showed that

Through a series of targeted initiatives EGAP with its partners from academia, civil society and government plunged into changing this reality. So what did we do and how did we do it?

2015 Starting point

- March 2015 EGAP in collaboration with Kyiv Institute of Sociology conducts a nation wide Public Opinion poll on What Ukrainians Think about E-Government and E-democracy.

  November 2015 key stakeholders and e-democracy experts were identified - building of relationships begins through focus group discussions.
- EGAP initiates a joint *Open Mike for Policy Dialogue* project engaging key stakeholders, focusing on qualitative mapping
- Stakeholder consultations (focus groups) are held with representatives of government, media, youth, business, civil society.

2016 Process

- Analytical Report eDemocracy in Ukraine: Citizens' & Key Statekholders' Perspectices is produced, disseminated, press conference held and heralded as success.
- October 2016, Working Group on E-democracy forms within the Reanimation Package of Reforms, most are members of Open Mike dialogues.
- Constructive relationship with the State Agency of E-government is established
- December 2016 *Coalition on E-democracy* comprising 16 CSOs and the State Agency for E-governance is formed, MOU is signed.

2017 Results

- February 2017 - *Coalition on E-democracy* drafts the first National Concept for E-democracy in 3 months on a voluntary basis with EGAP providing technical assistance.

  Face2face consultations in 6 regions and a month-long national online consultation generate inputs and civic feedback from over 400 stakeholders across Ukraine.

  State Agency for E-Governance actively leads and approves the Concept ad
  In May 2017 - the Concept is officially launched at the Cabinet of Ministers and is in process of begin fully adopted by Government.

SUMMARY Through these activities the EGAP Program positively impacted inclusive, participatory and evidence-based policy making in Ukraine in three ways. Firstly, it introduced the importance of a process. It was not enough that analytics and legislative documents were produced, rather the focus was placed on relationship and momentum building through a sequence of reinforcing activities. Secondly, a significant amount of time was invested in relationship building. Where the civil society and government actors were fragmented at the onset, by building a team spirit over time built on co-leadership, trust and recognition of each partners' strengths maintained the Coalition on E-democracy cohesive and results oriented. Thirdly, including younger academics and developing a strong government partnership with the State Agency for E-government was unprecedented in this regard. It allowed for right balance of activism and political buy-in as well as for the document to be 'politically relevant', and realistic, knowing that after the coalition completed it, the State Agency would ensure its advancement through various political filters within different government bodies and namely the Cabinet of Ministers.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- Rotational Leadership in multi-member coalitions is key so that every organization gets a chance to lead the joint process and to create team-building.
- Combining mutually reinforcing offline & online participatory instruments in policy making process is possible and important.
- Establishing constructive relationships with state authorities is a process that can take time and patience but it is valuable and necessary in policy making.
- Financial motivation is not always the best glue in holding a coalition together; motivated and committed 'core group', enjoyable working environment are.
- Policy-making is an interactive process needing multiple inputs and collaboration; investing into positive, constructive relationships with all stakeholders is critical.