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## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **From the Process of Launch of Call for Proposals: Neighborhood Programme - INTERREG III GREECE – ALBANIA**

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1. The CBIB Project Team in Tirana's Office, assisted the Ministry of European Integration (MoEI) during the process of launching the Call for Proposals (CfP), under the Neighborhood Programme (NPs), INTERREG III, Greece –Albania.

This document is prepared for the attention of MoEI with the aim to evidence the experience gained from this exercise, present positive aspects that need to be further reinforced, and other issues identified where attention need to be focused in the future in order to improve the process.

#### **A. Information on the process**

2. The CfP was launched on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2006. The Ministry of European Integration undertook awareness rising activities for both central and local level. The awareness rising activities, called "Information Days", were conducted in three eligible regions under this CfP, Regions of Vlora, Gjirokastra and Korca. Another information day was organized for all line ministries and other central organizations.

The table below presents some data on the Info Days:

Place of Activity	Date of activity	Period before the closing date of the CfP,(initially) 29 <sup>th</sup> September, 2006.	Participation of interested beneficiaries from bordering regions of Greece
Region of Vlora	27 <sup>th</sup> July	2 months	No
Region of Gjirokastra	29 <sup>th</sup> August	1 month	Yes
Region of Korca	4 <sup>th</sup> September	3 weeks	No
Line ministries and central agencies	21 <sup>st</sup> August	5 weeks	N/A

4. The “Info Days” aimed at:

- Providing the potential applicants and beneficiaries with the general information about the Neighborhood Programmes;
- Presenting the NP Greece – Albania, objectives, axes and measures, as well as eligibility criteria.
- Explaining the application procedures for CfP and general guidance to potential applicants with regard to development of submission of the application;
- Informing the applicants about the support that MEI could provide to them, through the Unit for Regional Cooperation and the CBIB Project Local Office.

5. The “Information Package” developed by the Ministry of Integration, prepared with the support of the CBB Local Office and GTZ Project Office (only financial contribution) in the Ministry included:

- General Information on the NPs;
- Information on the NP INTERREG III, Greece – Albania;
- Detailed explanations for the Call for Proposals;
- Frequently Asked Questions (distributed in two last activities)

In the first activity the documents were distributed in English languages, only. While in other activities the information package was translated and provided to participants in Albanian language. This resulted to be very useful for helping the applicants to easily understand the CfP application package and follow the instruction correctly.

6. Participation in the Info Days of different beneficiaries coming from a wide range of institutions such as, local government units, business and culture organizations as well as NGOs was an indicator to assess the interests of different actors to participate in the programme. Observations of the CBIB team on the Info Days are as following:

- Organization of Info Days was *extremely helpful for informing the potential applicants and interested beneficiaries* on the opportunities for applications, measures and areas covered by the programme etc.
- *Involvement and leadership of the process by senior staff of Ministry of European Integration* showed was a positive occurrence, bot for strengthening of the role of MEI in the process as well as attracting high level of attention and participation from the regional and local authorities.
- *In the cases when the representatives of the regions were involved in the organization of “info days” helped in boosting participation and commitments of fical beneficiaries.* One of the activities that should be considered as “best practice” is the Info Day organized in the Region of Gjirokastra, where the commitment and participation of the Regional Authority was at the highest level and made the activity very efficient.
- *Organization of the “Info Days”, jointly with beneficiaries in the other side of the border helped to raise the awareness provided for concrete contacts and communication.* Again, as a model could be taken the Info Day in the Region of Gjirokastra. The participation of the representatives from different organization active in the Ioanina Region helped to establish the contacts, cooperation and helped the Albanian applicants to share with the Greek ones their ideas, areas of interests, priorities and agree for development of joint proposals.
- *Active involvement of the EC Delegation staff* in the information days, helped in providing clarifications to many questions raised by applicants, and reinforcement of the messages given by the Ministry staff on the *necessity to comply with the procedures.*
- *Participation in the Info Days of all high level authorities at the local level i.e. Head of Region, Prefect and Mayor, such as in case of the activity in Korca Region helped* for better articulation of the regional priorities with the local administration priorities in a given territory, and better coordination and selection of priority programmes.

29<sup>th</sup> of September was the closing date of the CfP. Due to high pressure from several public agencies which were behind the preparation of their proposals the Ministry of Integration, with its capacity of National Coordinator of the CBC Programmes, requested from the Managing Authorities and EC Delegation approval for the extension of the closing date of the CfP, up to 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2006. The extension gave more time to applicants to submit their proposals to the JTS in Thesaloniki.

The CBIB team has observed some issues, which should be taken into account in order to improve the process in the future:

- *Some “Info Days” were organized substantially late in the process.* As the table above presents, the potential applicants in the Region of Korca had only 3 weeks time available, from the Information Days up to the closing date of the CfP for the submission of application. This was too short considering the available time the potential applicants in the Region of Vlora had to prepare the applications, after benefiting from the instruction provided during the Info Day organized for this Region. Better planning of Info Days, or other awareness rising activities, will help applicants receive the information and advice well in advance. The best approach would be to organize such activities within a time frame of 10 days from the launch of CfP.
- *The Info Days activities must be combined with the training activities for the interested applicants* who want to take accurate knowledge and instruction about the application, or training on project preparation. Despite of the fact that the Info Days were effective, one day only appeared to be very short for most of applicants to clarify all their quires and uncertainties related to CfP package. This experience showed that there was a greater need for coaching or clarifications during the preparation of project proposals. This should be considered for the future.

## **B. Identified problems in the Call for Proposal package:**

The CBIB team noted also some shortcoming/unclarities in the CfP, package during the process of helping the applicants to develop the proposals.

- The Log Frame was not included in the package initially;
- Legal Entity Sheet was in PDF format. This created confusion to some applicants, who were not sure whether this document should have been filled in by handwritten, while the guidelines establish that all application had to be written in computer.
- No clear instruction on the implementation agencies and supervision agencies. This created confusion for most of applicants.

## **C. Difficulties faced by applicants in filling in the applications**

- The “expected resources” (budgeting) – generally there were no difficulties in filling in the section of “contribution in kind”, but applicants were not clear how to present the part of expenditures that had to be covered by the co-financing budget.
- Difficulties faced by public institutions and NGOs with the table at the paragraph 4.2.2, since none of these institutions result with debts.
- Uncertainties about the role of the “overall lead partner”
- Inability to define monitorable indicators
- Difficulties in filling in the Log Frame ;

- Difficulties in obtaining in time signatures (original partnership statements) from other partners. This caused considerable delays in completion of the applications. Some organizations had to travel up to the partner city for obtaining the original partner`s signature, while some others had to go up to borders in order to take or provide the signed partnership statement to the Greek partners
- Worksheet 1- Budget for the project is designed in a way to accommodate the budget items for “soft” interventions. Therefore it was easily to be prepared by the applicants applying for projects in Axe 2, but the applicants developing proposals for the infrastructure projects or other projects relevant to Axe 1 area, faced difficulty to develop the budget following the defined budget items as they stand in the form.

#### **D. Observations related to applicants behavior**

- In the majority of cases, we noticed that staff of the public agencies assigned to prepare project proposals, *paid little attention to carefully study the dossier and get familiar with the procedures*. This resulted in lots of mistakes or shortcomings in the way the application form was filled in and not compliance with the CfP requirements.
- *Lack of coordination amongst units*, in some institutions, resulted in, either sometimes too many people involved in the process, or this ended up being theburden for only one person. In many cases, this increased the confusion and impacted negatively on preparation of applications on time.
- *Often the staff (in the public institutions) assigned to prepare the proposal was informed in last minutes*. Only few of them were involved right from the beginning and attended the Information Days organized by the Ministry of Integration. Therefore they were confused on the procedures to follow. In some cases the task was transfered from one staff to another late in the process, thus creating more confusion among the technical level staff.
- Some institutions *worked in an “emergency situation”*, thus drafting the proposal only during the last days. While in the case of applicants, whose technical staff was involved since the beginning into the process, and the team in charge with drafting the proposal had carefully studied the guidelines, the CBIB project support was concentrated to reviewing the proposal and quality control.
- The institutions that faced high difficulties in preparation of project proposal resulted to be the communes<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Two communes required support during the process: Commune of Leskovik in Korca, and Commune of Zerqan. In the first case, the proposal was drafted from a friend of the head of commune who was very experienced in drafting project proposals. While in the

## Key Recommendations

The following are some recommendations to improve the process in the future:

- Way should be explored to simplify requirements in the call for proposals. Guidelines of applications should be further detailed to provide sufficient guidance to applicants.
- It will help enormously the process is the CFP is published in the local language.
- Information and awareness activities should be organized within two weeks from the launch of CFP, and possibly should be followed up with training support.
- Most (if not all) public *institutions* in Albania need support with training on development of project proposals. PCM training is highly needed.
- Due to the fact that the number of call for proposal under IPA CBC programmes is expected to increase, it will be recommended to establish permanent units in public institutions specialized in preparing project proposal, or at least establish a core group of people properly trained for this.
- Despite of training, it should be ensured that the *staff* involved in the process, should as minimum read the application rules and get familiar with them prior to start developing the project proposals.
- The preparation of the project proposal from public institutions requires team work, especially where involvement of different specific area specialists is needed.

*Tirane November, 2006*

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second case, the head of commune has requested the help from one business person, involved in private activities. The person had neither any idea about the CARDS programme , nor English skills to write the proposal.