


Swiss-Ukrainian project
DESPRO
Decentralization Support in Ukraine

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skat Swiss Resource Centre and
Consultancies for Development

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN COMMUNITIES



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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

Around 30% of the Ukrainian population live in rural territories. Prior to the start of the current decentralisation reform in 2014, the quality of municipal services provided in rural territories was very poor, with high levels of unemployment and poverty, and weak engagement of youth, people employed in the agricultural sector or self-employed people. This had repercussions on social well-being and led to a fall in life expectancy among the rural population of Ukraine.

The national government attempted to support agricultural and rural development in Ukraine – albeit with no systemic and sustainable approach and no sound development strategy in place. Rural development programmes were underfinanced, deprioritized or lacked a holistic approach.

With the adoption in 2014 of the State Strategy for Regional Development 2020 (August 6, 2014, # 385), every region (oblast) of Ukraine was required to formulate their oblast development strategies. With no practical experience, they frequently had more of a formal than an operational character. In 2015, the Budget Code of Ukraine established a State Fund for Regional

Development (SFRD): 1% of the state budget general fund was allocated to SFRD for the implementation of projects/programmes which:

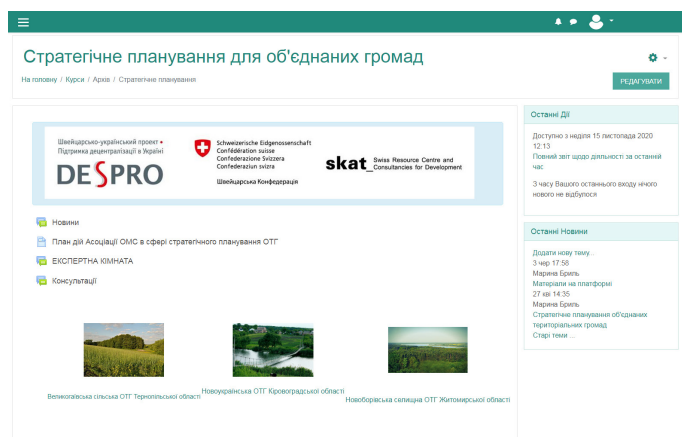
- correspond to the state and regional development strategies;
- are part of intermunicipal cooperation;
- support the voluntary amalgamation of territorial communities;
- provide Internally Displaced People with accommodation;
- are integrated into local development strategies.

Gradually the quality of oblast development strategies increased, but local strategic documents remained of poor quality. The experience of local development strategies preparation was new for Ukrainian communities and presented a significant achievement in itself, as communities were otherwise unable to get additional funds for their development projects from SFRD.

In 2015, DESPRO initiated support activities that aimed at assisting selected pilot rural communities in developing their local strategies.

2 Achievements (2015–2020)

In 2015 DESPRO piloted practical support to local strategies development in 3 village communities of partner regions (Novoslobidka village in Sumy oblast; Volodymyrivka village in Dnipropetrovsk oblast; and Teplivka village in Poltava oblast). DESPRO (in cooperation with local self-government associations) conducted 4 sets of workshops for the members of its strategic committees. In addition to the face-to-face seminars, DESPRO’s Community of Practice platform provided an opportunity to



continue consultations online. As a result, local development strategies were developed in all three communities.

On this basis, DESPRO developed guidelines for local strategic planning on the community level, including the necessary sample documents.

In 2016, DESPRO continued working with Local Government Associations to support strategic planning in 4 Amalgamated Territorial Communities (ATCs):

- Velyki Haiy ATC in Ternopil Oblast
- Nova Borova ATC in Zhytomyr Oblast
- Novoukrainka ATC in Kirovohrad Oblast
- Dunayivtsi ATC in Khmelnytskyi oblast

Because of cooperation with LGAs and DESPRO, all the above communities drafted development strategies following the DESPRO guidelines. Local councils adopted these strategies in 2017. Thus the developed by DESPRO methodology on local development planning was once again tested on practice and proved to be effective.

In 2018, DESPRO assisted Zaytseve ATC in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in their strategic planning process in accordance with DESPRO methodology. Thus, 6 rounds of trainings



were conducted for the community strategic committee that it formed. Consequently, the draft Development Strategy of Zaytseve ATC was elaborated by the end of 2018, finalized and adopted in 2019.

DESPRO's methodology on strategic planning was integrated into DESPRO's Local Self-Governance School training programme in 2017. The participants selection criteria were updated as well: DESPRO started to invite teams of 5 people from ATCs, which included strategic planning committees' members. Through DESPRO's Local Self-Governance School, 36 ATCs developed or updated their local development strategies between 2017 and 2019.

3 Achievements (2017–2020)

After the amalgamation processes started in 2015, when the first 159 Amalgamated Territorial Communities (ATCs) were formed, DESPRO initiated support on strategic development to the selected 5 ATCs. This support was provided together with local government associations to ensure a multiplication effect.

In 2017, DESPRO conducted a survey in 4 ATCs that measured the following aspects: level of citizens' participation and involvement in developing and implementing local strategies; local governments' adherence to the timeframe in order to implement strategic tasks; and the monitoring of strategies. As a result of the survey, the following recommendations from community members were drawn: to attract sector experts; to communicate regularly and widely about every phase of a strategy; to think realistically in

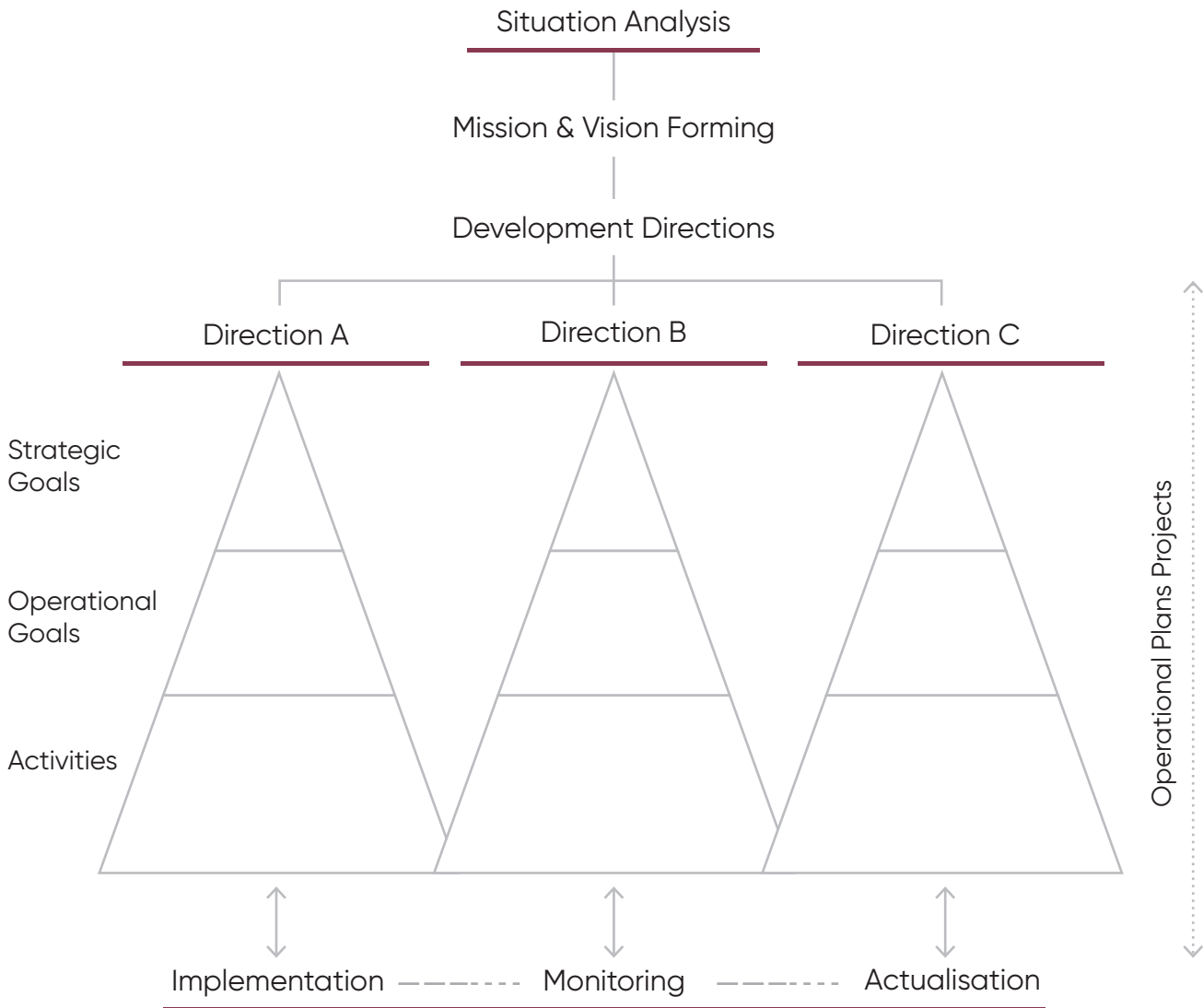
terms of available funds and human and natural resources. DESPRO considered this feedback for further work with ATCs.

As one of the ways for strengthening local governments' capacities, the DESPRO elaborated and tested methodological approach to communities' strategic planning in a number of amalgamated territorial communities. The methodology includes 6 sets of face-to-face trainings supported by additional expert guidance, consultations and coaching. Every training outlines the key steps of strategic planning, which community representatives conducted on their own:

1. forming strategic committee composed of Local Self-Government representatives, activists, business and Civil Society Organisation representatives;

2. gathering, selection and analysis of data which will form the analytical part of the strategy, its vision and mission;
3. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis to form the priority development directions, strategic and operational goals;
4. formulation and wide discussions of activities and measures to be used to reach strategic and operational goals;
5. implementation Plans and Projects formulation;
6. monitoring and actualisation of the strategy.

The scheme below outlines this process.



Along with the above sets of trainings, DESPRO carried out practical workshops for community members, engaged in strategic planning, on:

- communication between community members, and the establishment of proper communication channels among local government, business and non-governmental sectors as well as outside communications tools;

- local identity and social cohesion in the community;
- conflict prevention and conflict sensitivity;
- strategy monitoring and actualisation measures.

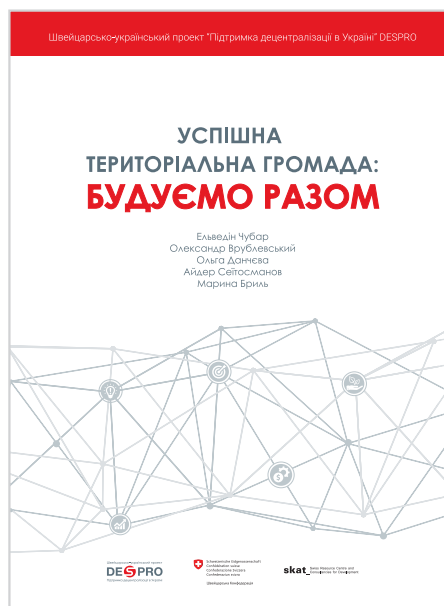
DESPRO considered these additional topics to be an integral part of the overall work for strategic development since they contributed

to developing the following community characteristics:

- participatory approach in a community;
- more active engagement of citizens in decision-making related to day-to-day life and local strategy implementation;
- more tolerant and constructive interrelations among community members.

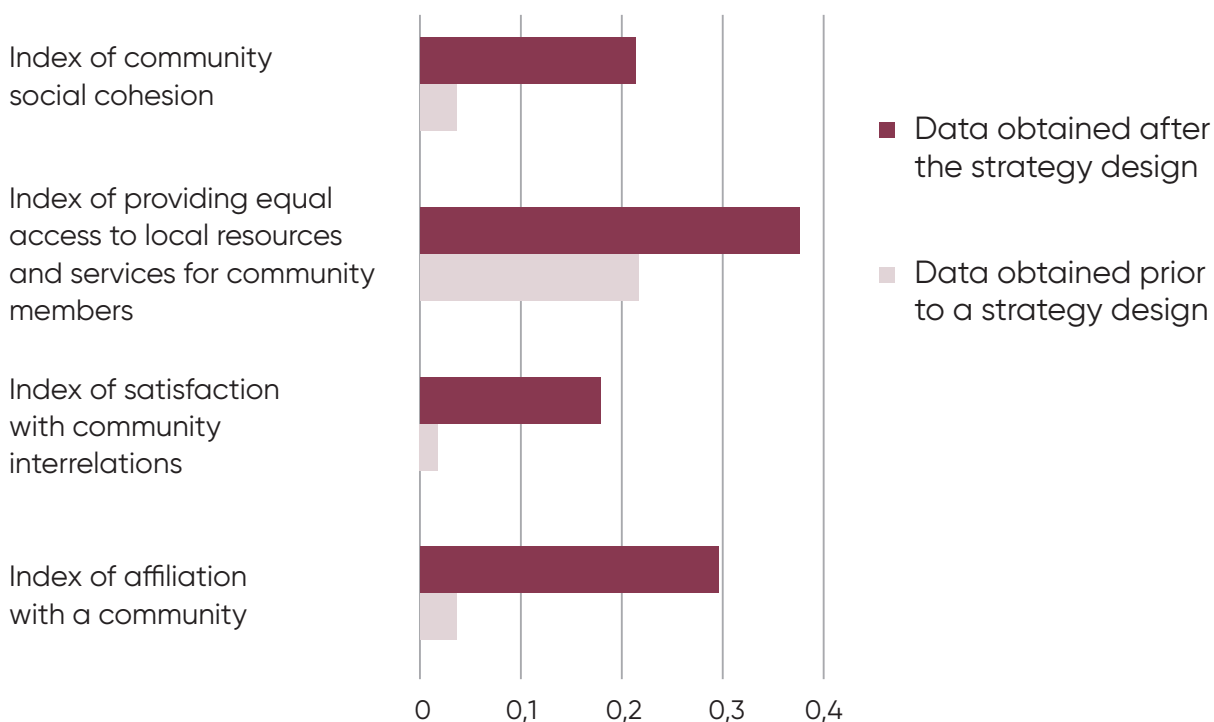
Adding these topics was justified by two surveys conducted during 2015–2018 in all the communities DESPRO worked with: an initial benchmarking survey and a final survey after

the strategies development. Through these surveys, DESPRO aimed to evaluate the situation in the community, including the level of trust in its head and executive committee, the level of interrelations among community members and the challenges that still needed to be solved. The comparative results showed the deepening of community social cohesion, increase of the satisfaction level in community interrelations among citizens, more favourable environment in terms of equal access to services and resources in a community, stronger affiliation of citizens with their community.



The data collected was aggregated into indexes (I) with values ranging from -1 to 1. A negative index shows the complete dissatisfaction of citizens with a suggested indicator(s). A positive index is interpreted as follows: $0 < I < 0.2$ – minor level; $0.2 < I < 0.4$ – lower than average level; $0.4 < I < 0.6$ – average level; $0.6 < I < 0.8$ – higher than average level; $0.8 < I < 1.0$ – high level.

The graph below shows the dynamics of changes in the communities based on the average data from 5 ATCs obtained prior to their strategy design and after the strategy approval. As we can see, after the active work of communities over a common task (their local strategy development), the cohesion, trust and satisfaction indicators more than double. This methodology was included into the DESPRO Guide, which has been downloaded over 5,000 times.



In 2018, DESPRO decided to shift this support by integrating the strategy development issue into the agenda of Local Self-Governance School to avoid duplication of such activity with other

technical assistance projects that had started working on local strategy development at that time.

4 Lessons learned

It is commonplace for Ukrainian ATCs to contract external experts for the elaboration of their local development strategies. It usually results in non-realistic documents that a community cannot use. DESPRO's participatory approach in strategic planning exercise ensures a working document to be in place that does not require its re-development with each change in local authorities. In addition to that, the establishment of a monitoring committee ensures the timely and effective implementation of a strategy and its update if and when necessary.

DESPRO's methodology of strategic planning in conjunction with the Local Self-Governance School training approach proved to be efficient and led to sustainability of local development processes. As they study in mixed groups, Local Self-Governance School participants also work on increasing the level of trust between Local Self-Government officials, business and civil society, and deepening cooperation among them. Participants also benefit from social cohesion and capacity building activities.

It should be emphasized that the work on the communities' strategies should always include measures for strengthening social cohesion in the communities. In this regard, DESPRO focused upon the following four domains as integral parts

for social cohesion:

- level of security in a community, which builds trust in local governments and among citizens;
- local identity, which prevents migration of the population to urban areas;
- good interrelations among community members;
- equity of access to services and resources.

Frequently, while developing local strategic plans communities may set rather unrealistic goals. This may lead to failure in achieving the targets, disappointments of community members, ad hoc remedy measures of authorities and consequent collapse of the strategy, making it an unworkable simple "paper on the shelf". Sometimes the overall strategic goal is completely absent from the document. There may be cases when strategic goals do not correlate with operational actions and the overall target of a strategy.

Hence, attention should be paid to the development of a proper monitoring system of the strategy by setting SMART (**specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound**) monitoring indicators, that will help communities timely evaluate the tasks implementation and correct activities when and if necessary.

Annexes (links to publications)

- DESPRO Guide "Successful Territorial Community: Building Together" <https://despro.org.ua/library/publication/UspishnaTerytorialnaHromada2018.pdf>
- Feedback on cooperation with DESPRO (from Zaytseve ATC) <https://zajtzeve.otg.dp.gov.ua/ua/novini-ta-podiyi/novini/strategiya-rozvitku-zajcivskoyi-otg>

