

CITIZENS' EMPOWERMENT THROUGH FIGHTING CORRUPTION

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The transition in Romania brought about, besides a range of important social-economic and political changes, an unprecedented amplification of the corruption phenomenon which manifests with increasing intensity in most of fields of human activities. The setting-up of the market economy mechanisms has represented a profitable terrain for the flourishing of corruption and its extension in the entire social life. So, nowadays many analysts say that it is generalized and institutionalized.

The failure to eradicate this cancer of our society poses major obstacles in creating a healthy business climate needed to bring in vital investments, in poverty reduction and reaching of a higher level of life. And, unfortunately, the most corrupt are high-ranked officials who extort big bribes and state funds in their own interest.

At the base level, the most frequent corruption acts happen in the administration sector where the use of public function for private gain and its sale as a good is a main way to maximize benefits and economic interests. This was rationale to choose "The case of the Mayor Lutzu" as an empirical case in Romania.

Introduction

Our paper responds to the invitation of the World Bank to frontally address issues of empowerment not only in development projects and practice, but also through social research. We have been directly inspired by Deepa Narayan's books about *Empowerment* and about *Voices of the Poor*, and by the World Development Report (2001) that made a path-breaking theoretical and policy link between empowerment and poverty reduction.

The challenge to us has been to place the empowerment issues within the Romanian context and Romanian realities. As you all know, it is a lot easier to speak and praise empowerment than to actually capture, "measure" and quantify it sociologically as a distinct variable.

We thought hard on how we can identify what is usually named a "strategic research site" which would enable us to lay our hands more directly on this process of empowerment, in order to "capture it in action," grasp it, measure its emergence, dynamics, and manifestations.

Finally, our search for a strategic research site resulted in a choice that holds great interest on its own.

This is the phenomenon of *corruption in the public administration arena*, of which we have plenty in Romania (more than we would ever want or need even for research purposes!) The paper we prepared for this conference, within Deepa Narayan's conceptual framework, is at the confluence between concepts and trends familiar to us all, such as: corruption; dis-empowerment; participation; and empowerment.

Our hypothesis is the following: in public administration corruption undermines democracy, robs people of the options to exercise their rights, and dis-empowers them. Therefore, when corrupt individuals and practices can be eliminated from a certain unit of public administration afflicted by them, the citizens may be empowered to exercise their voices, rights and entitlements. Finding a significant case if eliminating corruption will therefore enable us to measure the effects in terms of empowerment and design good indicators for such measurements.

The case identified was that of an ultra-corrupt Mayor of one of the Capital City's (Bucharest) large districts, who was caught, tried, imprisoned, and replaced. The new Mayor's office introduced indeed a different style of governance with citizens gaining much more access to the levers and seats of power. This is the empirical case we have analyzed. Our paper talks in detail how we have done this. I'll offer in this brief presentation only an abstract.

Corruption during Transition: Dis-empowerment Effects

Rationale

The transition process in Romania brought about, besides a range of important social-economic and political changes, an unprecedented amplification of the corruption phenomenon. Corruption is now present and intensifies in most fields of public activities. The market economy mechanisms represent a propitious terrain for corruption and nowadays many analysts consider that it is widespread and often institutionalized.

Fighting corruption became a key target for the Government, which developed an Anticorruption Strategy in 2001 but with still limited effects in Romanian society. Speaking in Parliament on the state of nation, President Ion Iliescu asked legal bodies to tighten the rule of law against those guilty of corruption, remove them from public life, and restore people's confidence in public institutions. The war on corruption is a priority for citizens as well, who pay the heavy costs of bribery and fraud.

A National Anticorruption Prosecution (PNA) agency was constituted for fighting corruption efficiently, but it cannot do too much with only 55 prosecutors against 700 cases of big corruption! In our country people say: "*We do have corruption, but we cannot find corrupts ones*". The newspapers write, for example, about "the local barons" of the party in government who make all kinds of illegal arrangements in their own interest, forgetting poor people's

needs and troubles. But very little has been done against them, because most are members of the government party.

As a direct consequence, the failure to eradicate this cancer of our society leaves major obstacles on the way to creating a healthy business climate, needed to bring in vital investments. Unfortunately, the most corrupt are high-ranked officials who extort big bribes in their own interest. Corruption seriously affects economic growth and poverty reduction. Though there is a governmental anticorruption strategy, only a few measures have been taken to implement it. Our working hypothesis is that this strategy is not enough, and it does not effectively mobilize the population and citizen's participation to uncover and eliminate corruption.

The most frequent corruption acts are happening in the public administration sector, in the form of using public function for private gain. The sale of privatized assets as part of the transition is a main way to maximize benefits and economic interests. The press and citizens' complaints point clearly, better than official statistics, to the involvement of state officials and local representatives in corruption, which result in resource redistribution in the interest of private groups with great loss for the process reform.

Besides its immoral and counter-productive character, corruption is a powerful impediment in the efforts to reduce poverty and social inequalities. It has a negative impact on development programs and policies, and last but not least, on strategies aimed at democratic empowerment of the poorest strata of the population.

So, special cases of corruption in Romania are the "service offenses" committed by some mayors which, according to Romanian law, include bribery, traffic of influence, abuse in power, and embezzlement of public funds for personal interest.

In the last five years, despite increasing number of citizens' complaints about corruption acts of mayors has increased (see Annex), state authorities have not taken firm actions to punish them. Often they have even covered up cases involving the mayors belonging to the party in government. Yet, there were a few cases where community as a whole acted perseveringly against corruption at local level, demanding and finally obtaining the elimination of the corrupt mayors.

Indicators of Power and Empowerment: Community Involvement in Fighting Corruption

In our view, citizens' involvement in opposing corruption at local level offers more than one dimension for measuring empowerment.

In Romania, the Mayor's office (Primaria) is a crucial institution in people's life. The allocation of public funds, implementation of socio-economic

development programs, the financing of social assistance, infrastructure modernization, and general public administration are only some of the Primaria's prerogatives as an institution with communitarian character. Unfortunately, these are also exactly the areas of most abuses and corrupt activities in Romania by mayors and the representative of Local Councils. For instance, the implementation of the law of restitution of agricultural and forests lands, essential for transition purposes and for enabling many people to regain their confiscated properties is one most profoundly distorted by the corruption of many local power representatives.

An opinion pool, carried out 2 years ago, found that the vast majority of people (75%) regarded the Primaria and the mayor as crucial for many aspects of their existence. But only a small minority – about 15% of the respondents, felt that the Primaria and the mayor are a credible institution. Most explained their negative answers by stating that the mayor and the representatives of local power are corrupt and abuse their functions for gaining personal advantages. "Only if you bribe the mayor does he gives you your land back. He makes the law", the respondents say.

Because central authorities have not taken action against abuses perpetrated by mayors despite bottom-up signals, the majority of citizens feel discouraged and abandoned, powerless and voiceless. They are deprived of information needed to influence Primaria's decisions or to participate in decision makings. They have no effective mechanisms for making transparent decisions concerning community life and for holding the local representatives accountable for the policies that affect their well being.

In conclusion, being excluded from participation in decision-making and from allocation of local resources, and living in an unequal power relations network, the citizens become silent witnesses of their own existence. They have limited control over key aspects of their existence. Their voicelessness, powerlessness, distrust, and incapability to change abusive decisions and corrupt acts of local power representatives are the key concepts for understanding and measuring the levels and forms of empowerment in many communities in Romania. This substantiates our hypothesis that only by gaining economic, political, and cultural control over decisions and resources, the citizens can gain "voice" and "capability" to make local governors accountable for their illegal acts of corruption. Only afterwards can they become really "empowered".

Because under circumstances of extended corruption poor people tend to be powerless, we can derive several indicators for measuring empowerment as a reversal of this situation. For instance:

- Since the hidden corruption of government/public/ local officials deprives citizens of rights and entitlements granted to them formally, fighting corruption successfully makes formal "rights" and

“entitlements” more real, not only “paper-rights”: Therefore, we must measure the actual exercise of some such entitlements and rights.

- Fighting corruption gives more “voice” and more power to the powerless: Therefore, we must measure “voice”.
- Fighting corruption encourages people to participate more: Therefore, we must measure various forms and manifestations of “participation” where some success in fighting corruption in a community or institution is achieved. Our hypothesis that participation increases as a result of fighting corruption could be empirically confirmed or falsified.
- Fighting corruption increases the sense of “ownership”- a psychological variable in this case - which is expressed in a heightened feeling of security, of being in control of one’s own affairs, in a stronger sense of pride and human dignity.
- Fighting corruption successfully results in increased propensity for collective actions, and social energy mobilization. People are more ready to contribute their energy and become less cynical. This again is empowerment, strengthening the posture of the poor as “stakeholders”.
- Fighting corruption enhances trust, thus it increases social capital and social cohesion. Therefore, measurement of changes in trust levels is a way of measuring empowerment – the trust in the central or local government, in leaders, in the citizens’ capability to reduce corruption.

In conclusion, the various dimensions and indicators of citizens’ empowerment can be grasped in our case by observing the involvement of these citizens in fighting corruption. Better knowledge of citizens’ involvement can help us decipher better the dimensions and indicators of citizens’ empowerment.

A Case for Empirical Research in Romania: “The Case of the Mayor Lutzu”

A major case in Romania which demonstrated the importance of citizens’ involvement in fighting corruption was the so-called “Lutzu case”.

As mayor of District 4 of the Bucharest Municipality – the capital of Romania - elected of 1996 on the lists of the governmental party, Marin Lutzu perpetrated between 1996 and February 2000 - when he was removed and arrested – many abuses and corrupt acts. The most serious abuse was the appropriation - through a simulacrum of auction - of 6 agricultural-food markets from South of the capital, the biggest and the richest markets in the area. The mayor, together with his daughter, the Secretary of the Primaria and 30 (out of 32) council members of the Primaria-established a new firm “Comprest” having as object of activity, among others, modernization and exploitation of these

markets. Then, through an “official” decision (signed by the Mayor, the Secretary and the councilors), this firm was declared the winner of the auction and, on this “legal” base, it was given the right of concession over those 6 agricultural-food markets for a period of 20 years. The auction was faked. Only 2 firms participated: “Comprest” – a firm established only a few months before the auction, though according to Romanian law it had to have balance sheets from the last 3 years -- and a second firm belonging to the chief of mayor’s office with only a decorative role: to give the appearance of legality to the faked auction led by mayor and his accomplices.

This was only one of the many onerous businesses of this mayor, nicknamed in the media “Octopus Lutz”. When the authorities’ finally did a search in his house, they found great amounts sums of money, bank savings, and other important values like: expensive wrist watches, collections of paintings, precious icons, sculptures by famous artists, and other things. In fact, as it was proven later, after becoming Mayor, Marin Lutz had also became, in the short time, one of the richest individuals in Romania.

Yet in Romania it is also possible today to fight corruption despite it being considered a “fatality”.

We have to note, first, that many complaints sent by citizens and businessmen to different authorities – the Police, General Prosecution, the Control Dept. of the Prime Minister, the Parliament’s Commission of Abuses, etc, remained without any answer. Like other statesmen accused of corruption. Mayor Lutz benefited of “immunity”. For all his illegal acts he received only a simple reprimand from the governmental party to whom he belonged.

As a consequence of this perpetual refusal of the authorities to take actions against the case of a corrupt mayor, a group of citizens, disadvantaged by the fake auctions and transactions made by the Primaria, adopted different forms of protest: they organized meetings of protest and wrote “manifests” in which they disclosed to the public opinion the abuses of Primaria’s leaders. One of this manifests sounded like this: *“We call on the merchants of all markets, commercial societies, individuals, family associations, to oppose the illegal actions of Primaria by all legal ways, by creating committees to inform and make complaints about perpetration of business crimes. This way we will defend our interests and also fulfill our civic and moral obligation!”*.

In brief, the case of this corrupt mayor became an opportunity for citizens from District 4 of the capital to unite in the fight against an endemic phenomenon in Romania and to crystallize a “collective conscience” against public officials’ corruption.

In this light, we contend that measuring empowerment can be achieved through the evaluation of such collective actions and initiatives, because these help the population to become more and more conscious of its entitlements and

interests, to assert its right to be informed and to hold accountable local governments.

Distilling and Testing Indicators of Citizens' Empowerment

In our opinion, distilling and testing indicators for measuring empowerment, can be achieved through evaluation of community involvement and participation in fighting corruption. This dimension could be made operational.

As any social problem, corruption involves two main elements:

a) An objective condition, whose real content is measurable through the damages caused to public resources and interests, the conditions in which it is perpetrated, and the position of the authors of corrupt acts;

b) A subjective condition which consists in concerns and worries of many persons, difficult to quantify but meaningful for people is perception of a phenomenon that affects the conduct of public life.

Only when the members of a community become aware that their interests are hurt and, consequently, they mobilize themselves specially for fighting against a corrupt mayor, for instance, can it be said that the corruption phenomenon is not only an undesirable objective condition, but also a veritable social problem. In this case, the opinions of insiders are more important than those of outsiders observers.

All social problems, including corruption, have a "natural history" which means that people are increasingly aware of their gravity, according to certain stages of their own evolution. Every new stage brings new elements. The following stages are the most important in the case of community members' involvement against corruption:

a) The stage of making people aware of something - the most characteristic effect of this stage is the genesis of a new collective awareness embodied in the idea that "We have to do something for solving this problem. This situation is unbearable". The "Lutzu case" and others cases, for instance, could not become publicly visible without citizens' actions who, after becoming exasperated by authorities passivity, resorted to the media. Through its visible signals, the press helped catalyze a flow of "public opinion" favorable to fighting corrupt mayors.

b) The stage of reactions concerning a very specific problem - the awareness of the "corrupt mayors" problem became a constant object of public debates, engaging, on the one hand, public opinion reactions, and on the other hand the authorities' reactions. Public debates, hosted by mass media, parliamentary interpellations, etc. generally tried to answer the question: "What must be done concerning the problem of corrupt mayors?"

c) The stage of citizens' reactions to the way authorities react. The inability of power representatives to take firm measures against corrupt mayors caused strong discontents citizens and determined protests and the formation of different associations for collective more impactful action.

d) The stage of action - following public debates - implies citizens' mobilization, on the one hand, and of the authorities, on the other hand, with the aim to initiate actions and improve policies. Unlike previous stages, that one is characterized by dynamic action and community mobilization. That means that people pass from problem awareness to the organization of collective actions. Such actions, like in "Lutzu case" and other corrupt mayors, have been upheld in an institutionalized form by different ad-hoc associations created and also by some central authorities.

In our opinion, the succession of these stages (which can be reflected in specific indicators) can be summed up as the crystallization of a "communitarian consciousness" in fighting corruption of mayors, these "large scale solutions to such a serious and generalized problem in Romania

Starting from assessing formation and gradual affirmation of this communitarian consciousness, some specific indicators for Measuring Empowerment could be identified.

The "Voices of the Empowered" get a Hearing: the After-Effects of Removing a Corrupt Mayor

Aware that real distilling and testing indicators and measurements could be done successfully only through an empirical case research, we propose to continue investigations in the same District 4 in Bucharest after the removal of the mayor Lutzu Marin. We plan to analyze: if something changed for the better for those 300.000 inhabitants from this district in the new legislature (2001-2004) now have a new mayor representing the new government party (PSD-Social Democratic Party); if this mayor has learned something from the mistakes of the previous one; and if his program aims Primaria's democratization and modernization. Now the research field will move to the citizens and Primaria as a state institution.

The primary questions in our research project are:

- What are the citizens doing now?
- After the removal of corrupt mayor has the new mayor really tried to "empower" the population or not?

The strategic researchable questions in the center of our work are:

- Do the citizens participate more than before in the exercise of power? It must be researched. This can be or not confirmed by the facts: We will submit to the "tyranny" of facts.

- Have the employees of Primaria become more accountable and responsive to the citizens petitions?

- Have the mayor and his employees enlarged the space for democracy inside and outside of Primaria?

- Is this democratic space used fruitfully in favor of citizens?

From the methodological point of view another range of questions are posed:

- What kinds of activities by citizens and employees are susceptible to empirical measurements?

- How could these measurements made operational in the research process?

Among other subjects, we must also ask the mayor about his new work strategy after the corrupt ex-mayor was unmasked and eliminated from the top, in other words, we must assess if there is a new "empowerment strategy", at work, although we know that this concept and its complex meanings are not known in the socio-political practice in Romania.

Some questions could be:

- What were the first measures taken by the new Mayor, coming after a corrupt Mayor?

- What did he do to promote people's participation inside and outside of Primaria?

- How did he act in the case of petty bribery if it happened?

The final conclusion and the core of our whole research program consist in finding out the answers of these questions:

- Are the citizens being "put first"?

- Are they being gradually empowered now?

Of course, the answers could not be a simple "yes" or "no". They have to derive from many other insights gained from research. If the citizens are being put first, if they are empowered we can learn from the strategy to inform them, to include them in important decision-making, to make the power representatives accountable, to help citizens to organize and mobilize in the discovery of corrupt employees and officials, as well as in public utility, sanitizing actions of the district.

Empowered citizens are better informed and, consequently, they are better equipped to take advantage of opportunities access to services, to education, to health care, to exercise their rights and hold state and non-state actors accountable.

"Civil liberties in the form of citizen-voice based on information, participation and public accountability can enhance the effectiveness of government action", write Narayan et al. in their work. So, increased civic trust in the Primaria staff and in its development program expressed through actual participation, would indicate that the climate and situation have changed

radically in the Primaria of the District 4 in Bucharest. These are, of course, working hypotheses, which must be verified empirically in the field.

It is easy to see that this possible research project is built on the idea of Deepa Narayan et al. from "Voices of the Poor". It aims to be a positive replica in a case of successful fighting corruption. The framework of "Voices of the Empowered" is also inspired from the model of Narayan in "Voices of the Poor".

Like poverty, empowerment is a multidimensional phenomenon and it is complex and institutionally rooted. It demands state reform for creating conditions in which citizens could inform, participate, associate and make decisions. All these lead to improved development outcomes including better local and national governance, access to justice, provision of public services and pro-poor market development. Empowerment has also positive effects on the civil society cohesion, strengthened citizens' organizations, and on people's assets and freedom of choice. Empowerment patterns vary from country to country and are different in terms of social history, social groups, level of economic development and democratic traditions. Even in every institution different patterns of empowerment could be found.

According to the four key elements (information, inclusion/participation, accountability and local organizational capacity), the empowerment process has many dimensions. Focusing on dimensions is a proper way to define indicators and measure them. In our conception, empowerment has these dimensions: cultural-informative, political, social, economic, institutional, judicial and moral. They are intertwined, meaning that some indicators are common to 2-3 dimensions. But every dimension has its strong indicators which define it and could be measurable by quantitative and qualitative methods.

Multidimensional operational character of *Empowerment*

We must mention that the concept "Empowerment" in Romanian language could not be translated by a single word. To be well understood it must be explained in context. This concept offers a new pattern of analysis and social action, it reveals the latent potential of poor people and gives them the awareness of their inner powers to organize, work together and mobilize for the benefit of community. But it also has a high level of idealism and desirability. These derive from the fact that the elements and factors of empowerment appear sometimes to be easily achieved everywhere by people with different experiences and patterns of life. In fact, these social imperative processes are very hard to reach. For instance, in Romania, local organizational capacity, the demand side of governing, bottom-up discussions of budget are less developed aspects of social and political life. Therefore, the authors

consider that empowerment of poor people remains an ideal rather than a reality in most developing countries.

The theoretical pattern should include, in our opinion, the following dimensions:

Cultural - informative dimension

Without information, people remain powerless and voiceless. Information means power. Therefore, giving them information we give them power to express themselves, to demand their rights, to hold responsible the government and state officials, to participate in actions concerning their life. Access to school and education is also a means to form leaders of opinion and action capable to shape peoples' thinking and behavior. The culture of empowerment is an important aspect of this dimension. By it we mean the effort to make understandable to the citizens the rich significances of the term "empowerment" for their life.

The indicators of this dimension could be the "voice" of ordinary citizens in addressing collective needs; the number of initiatives proposed in the community life; the increasing interest in the way in which the budget and local financial resources are spent; protest actions against corrupt acts, the need to have access particularly to financial information to curb corruption; exposure to mass media to hold government officials accountable; the desire to increase cultural and professional information and become well - trained .

In this case we can measure: the number of "voices" and initiatives, the social and economic effects of officials' interpellations concerning the way of spending public money, the concrete measures taken after the protest actions and interviews given in mass media on misused community funds, the number of the young people with high qualification who participate in the successful effort to empower simple citizens through information.

In the empirical investigations of Primaria as an administrative institution the indicators of cultural-informative dimension could be: post-box for the petitions and claims of citizens; posters with actual and urgent information advanced by District Council posed in the key places like crossroads, etc., in front of important institutions, stores and markets; publishing a newspaper; meetings with the citizens to find out their needs and include them in the future budget and development program.

Measurements can be made through quantitative methods like the number of actions, the frequency of some effects and qualitative methods: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participatory research method, free discussions.

Political dimension

Citizens become aware of their power to change the status-quo by voting and by participating in decision makings at all levels of society. This develops political capabilities: on the one hand, political consciousness: on the other hand, the capacity of an individual to represent oneself or a group and to participate in the political life of community or even of the country. In this way, the empowerment process produces socio-political benefits. Societies with large political liberties can better combat poverty, corruption and assure economic growth of people. Political dimension of empowerment is a useful tool to improve local and national government, to participate successfully to enlarge the space of democracy actions, to increase the trust in the capabilities of citizens to fight for equality and equitable relations between them, to combat corruption

The political dimension has as indicators freedom of information, the liberty to form associations and unions, free access to press and equal access to justice, freedom to participate and speak at public debates, collective awareness, actions and decision makings concerning rights and entitlements.

Measurement in this case means to pose these indicators in quantitative terms – number, frequency obtained from opinion survey – or in qualitative terms using nuanced and concrete description of “empowered people” about their new “powers” which changed the life of the whole community.

Social dimension

This is expressed in the need of the people to be included, to participate in, associate and build the local organizational capacities with the aim to be better heard by those powerful. World Bank studies show that a higher level of social capital measured by membership in groups with collective interests and powerful ties among people could generate a higher level of satisfactions and even of family incomes.

Social dimension indicators like satisfactions, social cohesion, social capital and strong ties are hard to measure through quantitative methods. So, the best are the qualitative assessments and self-evaluations of participants in the process of empowering.

In the study of all dimensions the main method of research will be participatory Empowerment Assessment – PEA - which means that we will use the perspective of “empowered people” themselves to understand the process of empowerment and their involvement in development programs. To see the world through the eyes of those who became more powerful and voiceful and to describe this world in their own terms is a veritable model of authenticity and scientific validity.

Economic dimension

This is a strong and a crucial dimension of empowerment and is important in our analysis because it constitutes a fundamental cause of structural inequality that affects the quality of life and capacity of decision. Without economic power and material assets it is hard to speak about well-being, access to decisions, and taking control and action to overcome obstacles to reducing social inequalities. A high economic status of a social group consisting of physical and financial assets like: land, housing, livestock, savings and jewelry enhance its security, self-confidence and capacity to negotiate fair deals for that group and decrease its vulnerability. Some researchers consider that to exercise strategic life choices it is necessary to have: access to resources, agency and outcomes. All these assets as well as access to resources, institutions and outcomes could be indicators of economic dimension and, implicitly, of economic empowerment.

These indicators, being predominantly of material and financial nature they could be easier measured. Those of social and institutional nature require another kind of measure, obtained through a distilled qualitative analysis.

Economic empowerment through fighting corruption is obvious in increasing the budget funds for public and social services, education, health care, cultural activities, infrastructure and finally, in quality of life.

Institutional dimension

This dimension of empowerment is an important feature because voicelessness and powerlessness are deeply embedded in the nature of institutional relations. Citizens' empowerment implies changing the nature of institutional relations that reflect the culture of inequality.

We suppose that in Romania the institutional dimension of empowerment could not be really achieved without a strong institutional reform and civil society participation. Otherwise, it remains a simple desire. Only state reform through laws, rules, institutions upheld by the state and changes in the culture, values of system and ethics of institutions creates conditions to enhance the citizens' capabilities to pass from the status of excluded people to that of empowered. Or, such an institutional reform is a long process, requiring deep changes in officials' and people's mentalities, values, and behaviors.

The main indicators of institutional dimension are:

- The Primaria's means to ensure access to information, its dissemination to help citizens to make informed choices; public consultation, studies about citizens' needs and worries;

- The Primaria's facilities to support inclusion and participation: local rules, regulations on people participation, social mechanisms to mediate relation among citizens and Primaria;
- The Primaria's facilities to facilitate local governance through and by citizens: incorporation of citizens' local organizations into district decision making; empowering district committees to review the Mayor's and his councilors' decisions and activities concerning community spending; identification of corruption cases, (if any), among the local government representatives and state employees of Primaria.
- The state efforts to invest in citizens' organizational capacity through direct participation of citizens and their representatives such as research institutes, NGOs, women organizations, parents-teachers organizations, etc.

Measurement of these indicators could be done through quantitative and qualitative methods. For instance, regarding the facilities to disseminate information, indicators could be: setting a center of information in the Primaria to inform citizens with the news from its projects; number of people involved in information dissemination; assessment of people's interest to be well-informed through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, etc.

The inclusion and participation require from the leaders of Primaria District 4, Bucharest, after the Lutz "earthquake", first of all, a new code of behavior that could be learned from discussions with citizens and employees, social analysis and participatory empowerment assessment. The satisfaction of citizens for being listened and treated with respect and dignity, to solve their claims is a qualitative indicator. It could be measured through social analysis and participatory methods. In addition, it is necessary a real financial project to form and make workable associations and groups of citizens to help solving community demands. To reach this objective in Romanian's financial condition, in our opinion, is almost impossible. So, the funds, the number of facilitators, types of activities, outcomes to attract citizens in common organizations to be better heard and meet their needs are measurable indicators through quantitative, qualitative and participatory methods.

Accountability, the ability to call public officials of the community to account, requiring that they be answerable for their policies, actions and use of funds, is a top problem in our project because of widespread corruption in the administration institutions, like Primarias. The indicators named previously: citizens organizations, citizens committees with the aim to control and make responsible local public officials for their policies, actions and use of funds are also the indicators of local organizational capacities. We have already mentioned that they are intertwined.

Concerning investments in local organizational capacity, we consider that this task is a new and a big one, for Primarias. In Romania after 1989, there is little preoccupation, if any, in this field. For example, in the problem of fighting

corruption, the rulers themselves were not interested in building new local organizations, since they were first to be involved in corrupt acts. So, related to fighting corruption, in our research project we will have difficulty in examining scientifically the indicators of this key element of empowerment.

Judicial dimension

A functioning judicial system and the rule of law are important characteristics of people empowerment in our country where the corruption infractions became so rampant that they can delay our future development on the way of joining European Union. They are necessary for a better investment climate, protecting poor people and their livelihoods, enhancing the citizens' trust in justice, in the power of truth and of its holders. For example, in the daily newspaper "Curentul", from December 23, 2002, at the question: "Do you believe that the National Prosecution Anticorruption will reach the top of Romanian corruption?" respondents' answer was: 97, 62% "no" and only 2,38% "yes".

The reform of the judicial system, aiming to create the legal environment for making accountable governance and empowering poor people and citizens by increasing their access to justice, is a priority task on the agenda of the Romanian government. Its declared goals are to improve the act of making judicial decisions accountable and affordable to ordinary citizens, to achieve an independent and accountable judicial system, to improve citizens' physical, cultural, and financial access to justice.

Indicators of this dimension are:

- corruption cases of the state officials and magistrates (the number of cases signaled by mass media, NGOs, citizens and self-signaled);
- arrest, penal judgment and punishment – three relative stages depending on political intrusion of the government party (the number of finished and unfinished trials by punishment and its performance);
- protection of poor people with limited access to justice,
- trust in judicial system
- perception (positive/negative) of judicial system
- accountability for unfair penal decisions
- adjournment of trials

Measurements of these indicators could be made through both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Moral dimension

After 1989, Romania is characterized by a deep and extended moral crisis in all fields of society. The propensity to material accumulation has become a fundamental moral principle. The fulfillment of this goal is most often associated with illegal and immoral facts. From an ethical perspective, the point is that people give up values like honesty, rightness, equity to become wealthy through any means. In this context the corruption blossoms at any corner.

Unfortunately, sometimes, poverty itself pushes to break moral norms and rules and this situation brought about the increase of the number of infractions and trials. (Therefore, measure the number of petty and big infractions).

It is immoral that for the petty frauds poor people receive many years of prison, while the corruption at high level is punished with a few years of prison or even forgiven. At the interface zone between justice and morality there are some common indicators like rightness, equity, correctness which could express the report between the size of infraction and the size of punishment.

Specific for moral indicators is their subjective feature, meaning how moral values are "lived", and the inner emotional reactions. They become manifest by happiness, pleasure, gladness on the one hand and by sadness, indignation, revolt on the other.

A specific subjective indicator of moral dimension is satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the role of incentive or impediments in cohesion/fragmentation of community-social life. Its measurement could be achieved by participatory empowerment assessment as well as opinion survey and psycho-sociological analysis.

*Concerning our empowerment framework, after an experience of 13 years of transition in Romania, we consider that the order and components of this schema need to be also seen as part of a change process. We agree with the idea that the first step in changing the status of poor people from being excluded to be included in the mainstream of development activities is the reform of state institutions. But, in our opinion, the state reform itself consists first of all in improved national governance, followed by improved local governance and a deep, extended and real reform of the judiciary system which strongly demands citizens' participation and the building of a veritable communitarian consciousness.

APPENDIX

Corruption cases signaled by the romanian press in which mayors and representatives of local authorities have been involved

1997

- On the pasture in commune Arieseni, county Alba, the mayor Rovin Lazea, grants many permits to local officials for building villas (May, 22).
- Vicemayor of commune Baia de Aries, county Alba was arrested for corruption (June, 14).

1998

- The Prefect officers investigate illegal allotment of lands by the mayor Gheorghe Prunescu in commune Petrachioaia, county Ilfov (January, 15).
- The mayor of commune Tzintesti county Bacau has been arrested because had received 1 million lei bribery (March, 15).
- Ex and present mayors of Targu Mures, county Mures, are accused because they have damaged the state with 4.3 billion lei (April, 16).
- A local advisor in Botosani has been in flagrant for receiving bribery (May, 23).

1999

- The policy asks trial of ex-mayor in town Costesti, county Arges for fraudulent appropriation of 128 million lei (April, 14).
- False certificate for the mayor in commune Siriu, county Buzau (April, 16).
- At Deva, lively quarrels between the mayor and Local Council – manoeuvres to give land to revolutionists (April, 23).
- Public property for sale. The mayor of commune Rucar, county Arges makes the law as he wishes (May, 25).
- The mayor of commune Andrid, county Satu Mare, has been forewarningly arrested, being found guilty for perpetration of infractions of embezzlement and intellectual forgery (May, 29).
- The mayor and vice mayor of commune Frumusitza, county Galatzi, are investigated for corruption (May, 31).
- Brasov. How the property right is respected. Policemen and mayors break the law. Abuses of the mayor of Sacele (April, 27).
- The mayor of Cluj investigated for abuse in service (April, 28).
- At the Primaria in Constanta, the rational use of public money – an optional issue (Mai, 22).
- The mayor of village Atrid, county Harghita perpetrated a fraud by falsification of documents concerning the help of people in need (May 18).
- After they have declared „Baile 1 Mai” as commune property, Primaria’s councilmen from commune San Martin used tourist resort as their own property (June, 26).
- Aurica Buda, the mayor of commune Tulca, county Bihor, found that she takes bribery, was no longer trialed. After investigations, Prosecution of county Bihor concluded that the subjective side of infractions is missing (July, 14).
- The mayor of Valcea, Sorin Zamfirescu, involved in embezzlement of funds (July, 15).
- Mircea Ionescu, the mayor of commune Voluntari, has been arrested for taking bribery (July, 25).

- The mayor of Deva, Mircia Muntean, takes advantage with state's land. Revolutionists were appropriated with land in a town where was not any shoot in December, '89 (July 22).

- With legal documents. In the commune Ideciu de Jos, county Mures, thefts from the state's money: a mayor, a firm, and one work – triad of corruption (July, 27).

- Counts Court in Bacau decided an ensuring distraint on the mayors' property and of the local councilmen (July, 29).

- Without any accountability for the citizens' problems in Cluj, the local councilmen appropriate the land for themselves and build their own houses (July, 29).

- Land stolen illegally by the mayor of commune Barcanesti, county Ialomita, (October, 5).

- 12 councilmen accuse: the mayor of town Buhusi, Mihai Gheorghita, has taken from flood victims' helps (October, 29).

- General Prosecution has been notified concerning illegal transactions with thousand of hectares in the town Predeal. Involved in scandal were the ex-prefect of the county Brasov and the mayor of the town (November, 5).

- Plunder at Bistret. The mayor of commune Bistretz, county Dolj, confuses the local budget with his own pocket (October, 8).

- The President of Abuses Commission of Deputies Room asks the Prosecution pronounce in the case of mayor in District 5 of capital, accused of abuse in service and taking bribery (November, 10).

- Dumitru Brank, the mayor of Arad, punished to 1.10 year prison with suspension for abuse in work and intellectual forgery (November, 26).

2000

- The mayor of commune Vidra, county Ilfov, sold 16 machines taken from the army worthing billions lei to a business man (January, 19).

- The mayor of town Bacau – expert in the „financial engineerings” (January, 21).

- World Bank paid private employees of a mayor in a commune. The money paid by The World Bank to repair the roads in commune Stanceni, county Botosani have been used by the commune's officials for personal interest (January, 26).

- The mayor of Giurgiu has frightened people of the town with his penal business (February, 3).

- Town Pascani is the headquarters of abuses and illegalities in Romania. Wrongdoings perpetrated by the mayor Neculai Ratzoi, related to the application of Land Fond Law have been covered by the prosecutors in Iasi (February, 8).

- As a mayor of town Cluj, Gheorghe Funar made contracts of billions with his son's firms (February, 14).

- The mayor of Pufesti, county Vrancea has been surprised in flagrant taking bribery (February, 17).

- First spectacular arrest of an infractor mayor, Marin Lutz, the mayor of District 4, Bucharest, for abuse in service against public interests, forgery and use of forgery (February, 25).

- The Public Ministry – an alarming judicial social phenomenon: covering of the penal complaints against the „infractor-mayors of PDSR” (Social Democrat Party of Romania), actually PSD (Social Democrat Party) (March, 25).

- Accused by viceprimar Darabont, the mayor of District 6 of Bucharest, denies his relations with underworld, but he does not deny his friendship with gangster Bucurenciu (April, 8).

- According to an opinion pool of CURS, the most public office workers, including the mayors, in Romania, are corrupt (April, 20).

- The mayor of burglars. The mayor of commune Pantelimon, in collaboration with local infractors, succeeded to establish a real mafia of property's titles for central lands (May, 13).

2001

- After the demagogy about „anticorruption” in the election campaign, attained its goal, the mayor of District 4 goes on the mayor Lutz's illegal activity (December, 6).

2002

- Corruption in Primaria in Bucharest pushes the government to extreme measures: anticipated elections in Bucharest (January, 11).

- 12 years of thefts in the Primaria of Bucharest (January, 14).

- Basescu, the mayor of Bucharest, continues the big thefts of the ex-mayor Lis (February, 13).

- Prosecution in Gorj decided the arrest of the ex and present mayor of commune Scoarta for taking bribery (February, 13).

- The mayor of Braila, Anton Lungu, has broken numerous laws with the aim that Rosario Raneri, suspected of bonds with mafia organization Cosa Nostra, to get a business of 3 millions USD/ a year (February, 14).

- The mayor of commune Darasti, county Ilfov, has been tried for corruption (February, 21).

- First blow given to markets mafia. Contest Council asks in the court to the Primaria of District 4 to cancel illegal auctions (February, 28).

- The mayor from commune Simian, county Mehedintzi, was arrested for taking bribery and fraud (February, 28).

- 12 mayors in Gorj county are penalty investigated for the way they applied the Law of lands and forests restitution (March, 1st).

- For a qualified abuse in service against public interests, the mayor of Deva, Mircea Muntean, has been penally investigated (March, 25).

- Infractional cases of the mayor in commune Jilava wait for investigation by Prosecution Ilfov (March, 23).

- The mayor of commune Slatina, county Suceava, was punished to work 600 hours in the benefit of the community for forest infractions (March, 24).

- Commune Damuc, „Sicily” of county Neamtz. Ex-mayor of the commune, Ion Frasinariu, has been arrested for illegal business with forest lands (April, 5).

- Encoureged by the first housekeeper, the mayor Klaus Johanis, the vicemayor of Sibiu spends public money helped by his wife (April, 8).

- Ex-mayors of Bucharest became millionaires (May, 13)

- The money from European Union was invested in the houses of Primaria office workers in commune Liesti, county Galatzi. Among beneficiaries: the mayor, vicemayor, his son, the secretary, and Primaria's councilmen (May, 25).

- The mayor of commune Margineni, county Bacau, investigated by prosecutors for false documentation concerning investments (May, 27).

- Mayors investigated by Prosecution for corruption were found clean as taken from the Romanian clean service “Water lily” by the President of PSD – government party Gorj, N. Mischie (June, 5).

- While in District 3 of Bucharest, a quarter of the streets have not water, sewerage, and electricity, the mayor of the District, Plesca, has taken billion lei from public money for his and his PSD colleagues villas facilities (June, 27).
- The woman mayor in commune Denta, county Timis, was imprisoned for taking bribery for 4 years (June, 27).
- Primaria in Tg, Jiu-town, "pays its dues" to the printing house of "the local baron" Nicolae Mischie, the president of PSD Gorj (October 8).
- The mayor of Satu-Mare, Hioera Anderco, penal sued by Anticorruption National Prosecution for taking bribery and abuse in service (November, 18).
- After has been sequestered the property for misuse of public money, the mayor of Brasov accused „generalized corruption" from the Local Council of Municipality Brasov (November, 28).
- The mayor of Craiova is unmasked on Internet being accused that performs the works on public domain at higher costs from Primaria money (December, 12).

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