

**REPORT ON THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF STAR NETWORK**

**(Phase I – Pilot Phase)**

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## **Executive summary**

The purpose of this pilot-phase impact assessment is to provide preliminary data on the impact of STAR Network (STAR) on the capacity of civil society organisations and individuals to engage in activities that bring about positive social change and cross-border cooperation in the Yugoslav successor states (YSS).

The assessment was carried out by MAP Consulting in the period from October 2—November 3, 2006. It is based on the personal knowledge and experience of the assessors on the current state of women's social and economic position in the YSS, complemented by insights provided by former and current staff members and STAR partners – individuals and organizations. A total of 43 respondents include 19 former or current STAR staff members and 24 partners from all of the YSS and the US.

The assessment focuses on two initial phases of STAR programming – 1994-1998 and 1999-2002/04. The review of impact focuses on the most important contributions of STAR's programmes in three main areas: (1) women's organisations' capacity, (2) women's networks, and (3) women's leadership and advocacy.

Sustained support to organisations outside the capital cities is identified as STAR's most important contribution relevant to the increased capacity of women's organisations. In terms of networks, besides significant financial and technical support to formal or informal women's networks in the YSS, STAR's impact is most evident in having been able to identify and nurture capable individuals and facilitate their networking, thus significantly raising the level of social capital in the countries and regionally. Consequently, these women leaders are able and willing to quickly mobilize themselves, in individual countries and regionally, in order to carry out complex and highly visible advocacy campaigns on a variety of women's issues – from women's political and economic status to antitrafficking.

Since (1) organizational strengthening, (2) networking and (3) advocacy and leadership were identified as key areas of STAR's impact related to women's economic and political empowerment in YSS in this inception report, we recommend a more focused and practical approach to the second phase of the impact assessment. A series of select case-studies, conducted by prominent women social scientists, that are relevant to those processes would provide an in-depth insight into the specifics of STAR approach within specific political and socio-economic contexts, drawing lessons learned on successful vs. less successful social interventions. We are aware that the proposed list of 13 potential case-studies listed at the end of the report is probably too many, but we wanted to illustrate the breadth of under-researched topics in the YSS related to women's political and economic empowerment and leadership.

## Abbreviations

AWIN	Association of Women's Initiatives ASTRA
B-H	Bosnia-Herzegovina
BHWEN	Bosnia-Herzegovina Women's Economic Network
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIPE	Centre for International Enterprise
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
GEMs	gender equality mechanisms
GTF	Gender Task Force of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe
INGOs	international non-governmental organizations
IPA	International Policy Advocacy
KBWN	Kosovo Business Women's Network
KWL	Kosovo Women's Lobby
KWN	Kosovo Women's Network
MEET	Microenterprise Education and Empowerment Team
MoR	Mentoring of Resource Women
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NGO	non-governmental organization
OD	organizational development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RAB	Regional Advisory Board
TA	technical assistance
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNTAES	United Nations Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WNC	Women's Network Croatia
<i>WNGOs</i>	<i>women's nongovernmental organizations</i>
YSS	Yugoslav successor states



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this assessment is to provide preliminary data on the impact of STAR Network (STAR) – both the project itself and its programmes – on the capacity of civil society organisations and individuals to engage in activities that bring about positive social change at the level of local communities, government institutions and cross-border cooperation in the Yugoslav successor states (YSS) – Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina (B-H), Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo (as an UN administered territory).

The assessment focuses on two initial phases of STAR programming – 1994-1998 and 1999-2002/04. Subsequent STAR programmes related to antitrafficking are not assessed in this report, due to the different nature and focus of the programme as well as the fact that STAR’s antitrafficking programmes only ran in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The first section of the report defines “impact” and briefly describes the methodology used. This is followed by a description of STAR as an organisation and its approach and strategy, as these two elements deeply influenced the relevance of STAR’s contribution to women’s leadership and organizing. The review of impacts consists of three sections, focusing on the most important contributions of STAR’s programmes in three areas; women’s organisations’ capacity, networks, and women’s leadership and advocacy. The final section proposes next steps of possible in-depth assessment to be carried out at a later date.

## 2. DEFINITION OF IMPACT AND METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this assessment we define *impact* as **long-term, direct or indirect effects produced by STAR’s programmes**. More specifically, the capacity **and** engagement of individuals, organizations and networks involved in and supported by STAR activities, in contributing to positive social changes at the level of communities, countries and regions.

This impact assessment is based on the personal knowledge and experience of the assessors on the current state of women’s social and economic position in the YSS, complemented by insights provided by former and current staff members and STAR partners – individuals and organizations.

We urge the reader to bear in mind that this assessment judges the current relevance of conducted activities, noting that it is not possible to draw causal linkages between activities of a single programme in a highly complex environment in which many development organisations worked towards similar goals. Therefore, we claim that STAR’s programme and activities interacting with various other stakeholders in respective countries presented necessary, although not sufficient conditions per se, that **contributed** to social change.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Van Den Berg, Rob D. 2005. “Results Evaluation and Impact Assessment in Development Cooperation”, in *Evaluation*, Vol. 11 (1):27-36.

The assessment was carried out by MAP Consulting in the period from October 2—November 3, 2006. (Appendix I: Proposal Work Plan). It consisted of documentation review submitted by Jill Benderly, STAR regional director, and additional materials collected by the consultants (Appendix II: Documents reviewed); written responses to questionnaires sent to former staff members and STAR partner organizations and individuals; semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews with select respondents; brief telephone consultations with select partners and staff (Appendix III: Questions for staff members and partners and Appendix IV: Respondents).

A total of 43 respondents include 19 former or current STAR staff members<sup>2</sup> and 24 partners (27 responded in writing, 16 were interviewed via phone or face-to-face). In terms of geographic distribution<sup>3</sup>, 17 respondents are from Croatia (2 former staff and 15 partners), 6 from B-H (1 current and 2 former staff members, 3 partners), 5 from Kosovo (only former staff members), 6 from Macedonia (3 former staff and 3 partners), 4 from Serbia (1 former staff and 3 partners), 4 are from the US or Croatia-based former staff responsible for the whole region, 1 partner from Slovenia. All of the respondents are women. Except for the contact list of former and current STAR staff, provided by the STAR regional director, all other contacts have been obtained through the consultants' personal links. Initially, it was planned to contact only 2-3 key partners per country or territory. However, in the course of gathering responses it turned out that most of the partners are familiar only with specific STAR's programs or activities so, in order to obtain a full picture and to clarify the current status of the results claimed in the project documentation, it was necessary to consult a larger number of the partners.

The assessment would not have been possible, given its short timeframe, without close insight into STAR's programming as well as general familiarity with the social and political background and environment in the region. All of the assessment team members had been associated with STAR Network in various roles and capacities. The lead consultant, Aida Bagić, had been a coordinator of STAR's grantee *Mali korak* in 1996. As a feminist activist, she participated in numerous STAR sponsored activities (e.g. meeting in Istria in 1995 and *Femisfera* in 2002), and was also engaged by STAR to provide various consultancy services in the past. The other two consultants, Marina Škrabalo and Nives Miošić-Lisjak, both worked for STAR. Marina worked as an intern in the World Learning DC office in 2000, while Nives

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<sup>2</sup> The list of former and current staff provided by the STAR regional director included 51 names. Several former STAR staff responded noting that they are not familiar with the current developments in countries where they used to work or with apologies for not being able to respond in the given timeframe. While the overall staff response rate of 37% can be considered satisfactory, we cannot estimate the response rate for partners since there is no comprehensive database of all the partners and it is difficult to estimate the total number, especially considering various levels of involvement in STAR's activities. The questionnaires for partners were sent by e-mail to STAR initiated list serves *poduzetna* and *femisfera*; and to other list serves used by women's organizations in the region (*cik-cak* in Croatia, *zenskaposla* in Serbia and Montenegro, *bhzem* in B-H, *kwn* in Kosova). Due to the low response rate to the messages sent to list serves, we additionally contacted key partners in each of the countries via phone and mail.

<sup>3</sup> Geographic distribution refers here to the country or territory where the respondents has been involved in STAR's activities. The current country of residence is given in the list of respondents (Appendix IV).

acted as Croatia programme associate from 2001-2002. Additionally, Marina worked as an individual consultant to STAR at various stages of its programming, pre-and post her engagement as STAR's intern in Washington DC. Our knowledge of the context, region and internal STAR functioning, as well as our personal contacts established in part through STAR, enabled this assessment to be carried out in such a short time-frame. In this sense, we recognize that personal biases may have influenced this assessment, although we have endeavored to minimize them by constant questioning of our positions amongst ourselves. We think that our different positions in relation to STAR as well as different time-frames of our engagement with STAR provided an opportunity to view same issues from different perspectives.

### **3. STAR'S MISSION AND A VARIETY OF STAR'S ROLES**

In the observed period, STAR's mission evolved and changed following the changes in social and political conditions in the YSS. In the beginning, STAR focused on reconciliation, supporting non-nationalistic women's organizations engaged in information exchange, refugee work and income generation. Changes in the political context prompted STAR to redefine its mission and focus on fostering women's participation in the development of (civil) society through capacity building in public policy advocacy, democratic leadership and developing linkages. This mission change is also evident in replacing "reconciliation" with "resources" in the organisation's name in 1999. Finally, a more stable environment after 2000, both within the WNGO sector and the societies as a whole, encouraged STAR to broaden the scope of its programme and strengthen cross-sectoral alliances of women to improve women's political and economic status in each country.

While STAR's intention was to work in all of the YSS, actual programming and its intensity was carried out according to available funding. Therefore, in the inception phase (1994-1997/98), STAR worked in Croatia, B-H and Macedonia, under USAID Trauma and Humanitarian Assistance grant scheme, with additional support by the UNHCR and World Bank for economic empowerment programs in B-H. Simultaneously, in FRY (at the time excluded from international development schemes due to sanctions imposed by the international community) STAR operated thanks to private US funds. As USAID opened its missions in all of the YSS, funding became dependent on the priorities and decisions of each mission. The second phase of STAR programming is therefore marked by somewhat diversified program goals and implementation in each country, although still within the mission scope. As local contexts as well as USAID missions' priorities evolved at different pace in different countries, they influenced the longevity of STAR programmes – Croatia, FRY and Macedonia programmes ended in 2002, while Kosovo and B-H programmes ran until end of 2004.

In the course of its presence in the region, STAR assumed different roles, and was perceived accordingly by different stakeholders.

In the *international community* STAR was perceived as one of USAID grantees and implementers, while at the same time it provided the opportunity for smaller US funders (individuals and private organizations) and large international agencies (e.g. World Bank and UNHCR) to support women's and reconciliatory efforts in the

Balkans, which was particularly important for women's activists' access to foreign support in FRY.

On the other hand, *local women's organizations* viewed STAR primarily as a foreign donor, especially in the first phase when it provided a large number of grants. Due to strong linkages of the two co-directors with women's organizations pre-dating STAR, there was also an understanding of the project as a *collaborative feminist Endeavour*.

The unusual project autonomy is also reflected by the fact that the project, during its 12 years of existence, had two "host" organizations (Delphi International 1994-1999 and World Learning Inc. 1999 – 2004 and onwards). STAR often used its position of an international NGO to facilitate cross-border and cross-sector interaction to the benefit of reconciliatory efforts or community development.

In terms of the impact on the international donor community, STAR acted as an advocate of women's and gender issues within the aid and development agendas. Additionally, local women's organizations got private US funds to which they would unlikely have access otherwise.

In the second phase (1999-2002/04), STAR started to, in addition to supporting women's organizations through subgranting and TA, develop and implement its own programmes focusing primarily on direct advocacy efforts and brokering cross-sectoral relationships. In that sense STAR contributed to the increased number of women engaged in promoting women's issues within their social settings. Additionally, STAR conducted and supported research that served as an advocacy tool, but also represented a contribution to the corpus of social science research in gender issues.

#### **4. STAR'S APPROACH AND STRATEGY**

STAR's approach is evident from its name – STAR is an acronym for Strategies, Training, Advocacy and Reconciliation/Resources. It suggests that strategies for influencing social change include simultaneous provision of necessary skills, financial, technical and moral support as well as direct advocacy efforts. In the words of a former staff member "STAR was a mix of a relaxed, activist approach to issues and an organization trying to act professionally through planning, reporting and monitoring efforts".

Therefore, the adopted approach was common in all of the countries/territories STAR worked in. As highlighted by all contacted local partners, STAR was different from most donor agencies, especially those making part of the larger development programs such as USAID, in its sensitivity and readiness to craft its activities according to the needs expressed by partner organizations, and, whenever possible, modify its programs in light of the arising needs of women's movements in specific environments. This difference is emphasized in various assessments of donor support to women's organizing in the region: "[...] some of the smaller woman-focused international NGOs were thoughtful about the real needs of an inexperienced local sector, attempted to defuse competition by networking and to develop capacity

through training. The US Delphi International/Star project and the Swedish Kvinna till Kvinna are among those cited appreciatively by Bosnian women's NGOs<sup>4</sup>.

At the same time, STAR was not in the position to ignore the dominant and changing development priorities in each country and the region as a whole, as reflected in the specific program foci on issues such as income generation in Croatia in late 1990's (as part of USAID's efforts to ensure self-sustainability of NGOs formerly engaged in relief work), political participation and democracy building in Serbia and Kosovo in post 2000 period, development of market economy in Croatia after 2000 or current focus on anti-trafficking, viewed by USAID as one of the top security issues in the entire region. Balancing these two, often opposing interests – the women's groups' and the donor's - remained a challenge throughout the project and required an inventive approach, including reliance on private sources of funding, establishing local and regional advisory mechanisms and awareness-raising and advocacy within the donor community.

Another important aspect of STAR's approach was its systematic strengthening of women's organizations outside the capital cities. This approach has had two long-lasting effects. Firstly, individual women from smaller communities got the opportunity to acquire new skills and knowledge, broaden their horizons and be involved in changes at the local and regional levels. The quality of their lives had positively changed, despite the scars of war traumas many of them bore. Additionally, by working exclusively with non-nationalistic organizations, STAR has indirectly contributed to an increased number of marginalized social groups' members being directly involved in social change in their countries, in particular women activists from ethnic minorities, such as Ashkali community in Kosovo, Serbian community in Croatia, Roma women in Macedonia. Secondly, by strengthening and supporting smaller formal and informal women's organizations in rural areas, STAR seems to have played an important role in strengthening the women's movement in the target countries. Most of the smaller organizations in rural areas became partners in nationwide women's networks and took part in various advocacy oriented activities that contributed to placing women's issues on the political agendas in their countries and to a limited extent in their own communities.

Very early in its programming STAR nourished the cross-sectoral approach to its activities. By responding to the needs of its partner organizations to gain access to the media, STAR organized joint training events and engaged women journalists in its activities, thus raising the capacity of both groups and creating preconditions for future successful cooperation. Representatives of the media got information on women's issues, while representatives of the NGOs gained skills necessary to successfully inform the public on their advocacy activities. Additionally, in collaboration with other INGOs operating in the countries, STAR facilitated meetings between women in political parties and women in NGOs.

In this sense, STAR was the forerunner of the cross-sectoral approach in development programming in the YSS that became an important integral part of donor agencies' agendas following the changes in political conditions, especially in

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<sup>4</sup> Cockburn, Cynthia with Rada Stakic-Domuz and Meliha Hubic: *Women Organizing for Change. A Study of women's local integrative organizations and the pursuit of democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Zenica : Medica Infoteka, 2001.

Croatia and FRY in 2000. Post-2000 cross-sectoral approach focused on facilitating partnerships between local and national level governments, the WNGO subsector and the business sector in order to increase awareness and find solutions to the burning economic issues faced by women in the YSS, caused by transition and exacerbated by the post-war conditions.

One of the specifics of the STAR approach is evident in the practice of information and contact sharing. In order to maximize the impact of informal networking and increase the social capital in the YSS, STAR implemented the policy of sharing all contact information of all participants in its events. In this manner, STAR facilitated future collaboration among women on different issues, but it also exemplifies STAR's understanding of the "information as power" concept, rooted in its feminist values – only shared information represents the potential power to achieve change.

STAR also had a specific approach to local staffing, which indirectly contributed to broadening the pool of women in the YSS directly trained in development project design and management as well as increasing the number of individuals capable of engaging in advocacy efforts and democratization of their own countries. Additionally, the decision of the two co-directors not to employ leaders of established or establishing NGOs may have indirectly contributed to the sustainability of the WNGOs. Although on occasion it caused some tensions between STAR and its local partner organizations it seems that this was a good decision considering the fact that most of the organizations in their early years actually depended on the capacity of their leaders to act as the driving force of the organizations themselves.

Similarly, STAR played an important role in empowering younger women in existing organizations, insisting on their active participation in all STAR supported activities. This resulted in increased leadership capacities of the partner organizations, but perhaps more importantly widened the pool of change agents in each of the countries.

## **5. REVIEW OF IMPACT**

This section of the report focuses on three aspects of STAR's impact: women's organizations' capacity, networks, women's leadership and advocacy capacity and gender equality mechanisms in the YSS – the latter as part of joint advocacy efforts. This structure enables a more detailed description of each of these aspects, but it is important to note that they are intertwined and therefore in practice highly dependant upon each other.

### **5.1. WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS' CAPACITY**

The main target group of the initial STAR Network programme were non-nationalistic women's groups and organizations, established mostly at the beginning of the 1990s in response to the war and with the purpose of assisting war victims and advocating a peaceful resolution of political conflicts accompanying the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In fact, at the time these groups were more 'feminist collaborators' than 'target groups', since international feminist collaboration, dating back from the

pre-war times, represented the basis for STAR's involvement in the region.<sup>5</sup> Personal links with leaders of already established women's organizations in the region, established by one of the project co-directors while living in the country prior to its dissolution as well as both of the co-directors through involvement in international antiwar activism right after the outbreak of the war, were crucial for STAR Network in obtaining the very first contract with USAID. After two years of operation as a Delphi International project, in the context of considering change in the organizational framework for the project, the USAID evaluators noted "By virtue of its track record, STAR would provide any organization with a foothold in the Balkans."

The groups and organizations 'providing foothold' differed in terms of their capacity, as well as their understanding of the role of women's organizing, depending on the larger social and political context and the overall level of development of civil society sector in each of the countries. In Croatia and Serbia they relied on previous experiences of Yugoslav feminist activism against violence during the 1980s, present primarily in the capital cities - Zagreb, Belgrade and Ljubljana. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the groups emerged most often from humanitarian projects of INGOs or UN agencies while women's organizing in Macedonia was based primarily on the traditional socialist mass women's organizations. While all of STAR's activities probably had some impact on increased organizational capacity, the most significant seems to be the support to non-capital based WNGOs either directly through subgranting and TA or by contracting more developed organizations, as well as individual women from urban centres to provide support services to less developed groups in smaller communities.

STAR as a donor contributed to the sustainability of organizations in the sense that the grants awarded often helped the organizations to bridge especially critical periods, to develop a new programme or to attract new staff and activists to the organization. During the initial years, in Croatia and B-H, STAR offered larger grants to a smaller number of organizations, often with an explicit purpose to develop the organizations' capacity to provide services to other WNGOs on specific issues. Later, as it is clear from a review of grants awarded in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo (at the time FRY), smaller grants have been distributed to a larger number of organizations.

In the period from 1995-2002, STAR disbursed almost 1,5 mil USD in grants for some 180 women's projects (Appendix V: Overview of STAR Network grants to WNGOs in the YSS). Almost two thirds of the total amount was disbursed during the first phase, with the largest number of projects funded in 1998. In the second phase of its program direct grant-making was limited to Serbia and Montenegro, while the donor's role in other countries has been replaced by more direct involvement into

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<sup>5</sup> Feminist orientation is implicitly noted also in USAID's sponsored evaluations in statements such as: "STAR is the strongest among the eight grantees in asserting that women should be viewed and treated not only as victims but also as survivors, family and community leaders, and, eventually, policy makers." Evaluation of the project 0016 trauma and humanitarian assistance for the Former Yugoslavia, 12 July 1996 (available at <http://dec.usaid.gov>)

actual implementation of various project activities.<sup>6</sup> STAR's role as a donor is highly valued by STAR's partners, especially in the light of the current decrease in funding for specifically women's projects:

*[STAR was] one of the key donors for women's organizations. One of our teams, providing direct services to women victims of violence, is currently supported solely by international women's groups or by individual women working for large organizations. Now it often happens that there is a 'gender component' in some big projects and most often that doesn't mean anything. [...] I recall being rather angry when I heard that the STAR Serbia is about to close with the rationale that 'mainstreaming' will take place. It seems to me that incorporating the 'gender component' in other USAID programmes is similar to the situations when Roma male leaders claim that women are included in their projects and the women are indeed included so that they clean up the yard [...] (Bobana Macanović, Autonomous Women's Centre, Belgrade)*

TA provided along with grants is also assessed as an important contribution to organisational sustainability, since it provided opportunities for organizations to develop skills in project proposal writing and reporting necessary for accessing other international donors and also, in recent years, domestic sources.

The long-term effects of the training can be traced in almost all of the areas covered (conflict resolution, fundraising, evaluation, media, advocacy). However, since similar trainings have been offered by other organizations, it would be difficult to single out specific STAR's impact in each of the areas. What can be claimed with some certainty is that STAR Network was often the first one to respond to specific requests by women's groups. The most important contribution has been in the area of increasing the advocacy capacity of the organizations. As pointed out by Rada Stakić from Infoteka Medica in Zenica (B-H) "For Medica, STAR was the first donor organization encouraging us to engage in advocacy, they helped us to understand advocacy as a legitimate and necessary part of our work and to step out of the purely service role of 'helpers'".

Attempts to establish new organizations under STAR's sponsorship were somewhat less successful. This relates to several initiatives by participants in International Policy Advocacy (IPA) and Mentoring of Resource Women (MoR) who developed plans for establishing organizations specializing in advocacy and organizational development. In some instances, as it was the case with the Association for Policy Advocacy (based in Zagreb, with founders from all parts of Croatia) and the Centre for Advocacy Development (Pula, Croatia), the organizations would be formally registered with direct financial support by STAR, however, they never developed beyond the initial planning stage. Similarly, participants in MoR developed a long-term plan of registering an agency, which would offer organizational development (OD) consultations to NGOs, local governments and businesses. Although a joint agency remained only an idea, all of the participants continue to work as individual consultants in the field of OD, sometimes along with engagement within their own organizations, and they still represent a valuable resource for a variety of local and international organizations.

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<sup>6</sup> With the exception of Kosova Women's Fund in 1999-2000 which, as a relief emergency fund, represents a special case.

Early attempts of establishing *PROFOSA* - Centre for Professional Education of Women and Rea Project (within Rosa House, a subproject of the Centre for Women War Victims) to assist women in establishing small businesses and access credit lines in mid nineties are rather poorly documented. Although they received substantial financial support from STAR at the time, neither of the two currently exists as an independent organization. If assessed as organization-building exercise, they may not be considered a success. On the other hand, they can be regarded as possible 'seed planting' for more favourable conditions. These early attempts of establishing organizational frameworks for income-generation activities have been carried on by individual women in different organizational and institutional settings. The Centre for Women War Victims, after continuing to offer courses on women's self-employment and business skills, transferred its programs to a new organization--the Entrepreneurial Centre Rosa founded in 2004.

As a rule, it seems that STAR's assistance to organizational development (especially when it comes to organization-building) had more significant impact in cases where there has been a more substantial base in terms of personal interests, educational background and previous experience in women's organizing. In B-H this may be illustrated by the development of *Žene ženama* to which STAR awarded an initial grant for setting up the organization in 1997. The founders of *Žene ženama* at the time already had some experience in women's organizing (Medica Zenica, Women in Black), including well developed links within the region and internationally, and this enabled the organization to draw on additional resources beyond the initial support given by STAR. *Žene ženama* is currently one of the leading B-H organizations, engaged in pre-election campaigns, research and advocacy on domestic violence and it also continues to support development of women's groups around B-H. In Serbia, similarly, the key to success of the Vojvodina Women's Initiative for Self-Employment seems to have been the combined expertise of a Serbian economist and a feminist with substantial business experience in the US, whose joint interest in offering practical skills to women entrepreneurs found initial support in STAR Network.<sup>7</sup>

## 5.2. NETWORKS

As STAR itself is a network of integrated programmes that provided sustained support to women leaders with a vision for interethnic cooperation and peace, it is not surprising that one of the most significant legacies of the STAR programme is an informal network of former staff members, associates, and partner organisations with substantial capacity to engage in advocacy efforts. They represent a critical mass of individuals and organisations active in promoting broader processes of positive social change including women's political and economic advancement. In that sense, STAR's networking efforts significantly increased the level of social capital consisting of feminists and their allies from different regions, sectors and

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<sup>7</sup> Appreciation of the initial STAR's support is strongly emphasised in a recently published book of interviews with women entrepreneurs attending Vojvodina Women's Initiative for Self-Employment seminars. See: Markov, Slobodanka et al (eds.): *Women in Serbia – An Entrepreneurial Challenge*, Novi Sad, Center for Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Management, 2006.

organizations, that can be mobilized fairly quickly in each country and even regionally, in order to exert pressure on national governments or increasingly, contribute to the policy solutions in their areas of expertise.

Networking as a central STAR strategy of empowering women within specific countries and at the regional level encompassed a variety of activities and it has been implemented through a variety of tools: training and regional exchanges, meetings of country specific and regional advisory board meetings, providing computer equipment allowing electronic networking, supporting local women's participation in international and regional conferences as well as organizing conferences on its own behalf.

While each of the activities contributed either to strengthening already existing linkages among individual women and/or organizations or to establishing new ones, here we shall focus only on assessing STAR's role in supporting formal and informal modes of interaction among individual women and women's organizations. While it became common to use the term "network" for almost all and any form of interaction across organisational boundaries, here we address only those networks where a pattern of regular communication and some level of joint action actually takes place.

In each of the countries where STAR was present, there are networks of women's groups and organizations, differing in their organisational form, scope and size of membership, and addressing a variety of issues. Some of these networks primarily serve for exchange of information on specific issues (e.g. violence against women, trafficking, women's health, women's studies) or for synchronizing and organizing activities, while some of them also represent a front for pressure directed towards institutions (domestic and/or international). This difference portrays the difference in the tradition of women's organising in former Yugoslavia, where a strong women's movement existed in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia, while Macedonia, B-H and Kosovo lacked strong feminist organisations due to a more patriarchal setting. Therefore, STAR's approach to networking differed according to these preconditions.

In countries with stronger women's movement tradition, such as Croatia, STAR adjusted to local conditions and supported networking efforts at the pace and in the form preferred by local organisations. Therefore, although strongly supporting the Croatian women's network in terms of providing funding for regular meetings it did not force its formalisation. STAR is, along with the Swedish feminist development organization Kvinna till Kvinna, acknowledged as one of the crucial contributors to its development, not only through early financial support, but also in supporting individual women's leaders in developing their advocacy skills. Today, Women's Network Croatia (WNC), formally registered in 2002, gathers some 50 women's organizations from all parts of Croatia and acts as a highly visible advocate of women's human rights. Over the 11 years of existence WNC maintained the continuity of women's organizing focused on public advocacy for women's political participation, women's reproductive rights, and combating violence against women. Additionally, WNC participates in the design of national gender equality strategies and action plans and prepares Shadow Reports on CEDAW Implementation. WNC is recognized in the public as the main collective actor for women's human rights, partly due to annual campaigns all network members engage in such as "16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women", continuous campaigning against gender stereotypes in official curricula and women's political participation. In

October 2006, the WNC obtained full membership in the European Women's Lobby. According to many observers, WNC represents one of the stronger networks within the wider Croatian civil sector network population<sup>8</sup>.

Similarly, in Serbia, where women preferred organizing in issue based networks such as the Network of SOS Hotlines and other organizations in the area of combating violence against women, Women in Black network committed to peace and antimilitarism, or more recently ASTRA antitrafficking network, STAR adapted by supporting the activities of each of them, without intentions to force the formation of a single women's network. In addition to providing grants and technical assistance to already existing networks of SOS hotlines and organizations dealing with violence against women, STAR supported Women's Movement-Women's Network, an activist project initiated by the Association of Women's Initiatives (AWIN) aimed at supporting women's groups and organizations in smaller towns around Serbia and Montenegro, including Serbian women from Kosovo. The Women's Movement-Women's Network currently functions as an informal network of some 60 groups coordinated by AWIN. The main focus in the recent years has been economic empowerment of women, especially through supporting the establishment of women's cooperatives. STAR's contribution to the Network, as well as to AWIN itself, going beyond the actual programming can be observed also in the fact that a former STAR staff-member, Aleksandra Vladislavljević, continues to be an active AWIN associate and assists the organization in a variety of capacities (program development, project proposal writing, mediating relationships with international donors—e.g. with UNIFEM, partially due to personal links with UNIFEM current staff established within STAR).

In Kosovo, B-H and Macedonia STAR engaged more intensely into establishing the networks, along with strong initial support to the development of newly established organizations. For instance, the Women's Health Network in Macedonia is lead by women's organization Sv. Nikole which was identified and supported as a STAR subgrantee as early as 1998, soon after the organization separated from a traditional umbrella Union of Women's Organizations of Macedonia (SOZM). Women's Health Network Sv. Nikole remains a functioning informal network, which has grown from 7 partner organizations in 2002 to 16 of them in 2006, covering the entire country. As confirmed by Sv. Nikole representative, former STAR country coordinator Aferdita Imeri is still involved in supporting the organization and the network, providing advice on a voluntary basis:

*Network members think that the work with STAR was very useful, especially if one takes into consideration that the first activities of Women's organization Sv. Nikole as a network leader were realized through STAR program.*

Similarly, STAR had a crucial role in the early stages of the development of the Macedonian multi-ethnic women's network ANTIKO, whose beginning can be traced to the regional training program for women NGO leaders held in Macedonia, supported by STAR in 1999, where the idea of an informal network of women activists, initially focused on facilitation of inter-ethnic dialogue at the time of violent crisis, was articulated and soon put into action. Until the end of 2002, STAR

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<sup>8</sup> Its only real counterpart among the Croatian civil sector networks, in terms of national relevance, power and influence, is the Green Forum.

supported ANTIKO by means of programming advice, training and funding. ANTIKO was formalized in 2004 and has grown into a network of 18 women organizations from 10 different municipalities. Even a superficial insight into the magnitude of ANTIKO's advocacy and education activities over the past seven years indicates that this network actually performs the function of a leading country-wide women's network, engaged in advocacy for women's interests in national politics.

As confirmed by former staff and key partners, STAR's strategy to invite women to trainings and meetings who were not necessarily in top leadership positions in local organizations, combined with encouragement of multiethnic events, proved useful for incremental (non-confrontational) transformation of the traditional structure of the women's movement in Macedonia, initially organized into three rather static and ethnically homogenous umbrella organizations.

Kosovo and B-H need to be viewed in terms of their internationally governed status where a variety of international, intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies interact. The Bosnia-Herzegovina Women's Economic Network (BHWEN) seems to be a locally initiated effort, where STAR responded with appropriate technical support and sub-granting. Transfer of networking experiences from Croatia and Serbia, however, may have had an impact on the very idea of Bosnian women to establish a national network, while its economic focus stemmed from an increased international support for economic development as a means of post-conflict reconstruction and democratization.

Although BHWEN is currently included in the regional network of women entrepreneurs and funded by the Centre for International Enterprise (CIPE), its activities seem to have been reduced after direct support by STAR and the TA offered by staff ceased. BHWEN was formally registered in Visoko in 2004 and its activities are very much dependant on the availability of its president Ms. Lejla Spaho. In her view, STAR contributed to an increased engagement of women's organizations in establishing women's cooperatives and by providing basic business skills to a large number of women. As some success stories of the joint STAR and BHWEN endeavour, Ms. Spaho lists Association of Women Farmers in Usor-Tešanj region gathering over 2000 beneficiaries, Centres for Legal Aid in Zenica and Zvornik offering information and legal advise on labour rights, while Vidra from Banja Luka continues to offer courses on entrepreneurial skills and to support women in establishing small businesses. The focus seems to be on transferring and supporting the development of practical business skills. It remains however, unclear whether there has been any continuity with involvement in advocacy regarding women's economic rights such as it was within the framework of drafting Bosnian PRSP. Current STAR staff, not directly involved in BHWEN activities, assesses its impact in the following manner:

*The previous BHWEN STAR's project has planted the seeds for increased discussion on particular women's economic empowerment. By building links between women entrepreneurs, providing technical support and increasing visibility - STAR helped shape the position and opened up space for dialogue with women engaged in business. On the other hand - I believe that by working on the issues of violence against women, and general women's human rights - STAR has contributed to the identification of the need*

*for increased work on women's economic independence and leadership.*  
(Selma Hadžihalilović)

In Kosovo, STAR supported Kosovo Women's Network (KWN), Kosovo Business Women's Network (KBWN), as well as the establishment of Kosovo Women's Lobby, a cross-sectoral women leaders' initiative focused on women's political participation, with recent emphasis on the inclusion of women in the negotiation process on the final status of Kosovo. STAR has also encouraged networking between women's NGOs in Serbian enclaves as well as their relationship-building with KWN. The context of supporting these different networks has differed greatly, reflecting the specifics of the development and interests of the women's activists in Kosovo.

In the case of KWN, STAR provided TA and advice, along with other international partners over the entire period of network formation, which was firmly grounded in Kosovo women's activism and functioning ties from 1990's. Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) is the strongest multiethnic NGO network in Kosovo, including 80 organizations, that has grown out of Rural Women's Network, inspired by the work of Motrat Qiriazi, a repeat STAR's grantee, focusing on rural women's education, humanitarian assistance and solidarity actions during the oppression of the Albanians by the Serbian regime in the 1990's. In 2000 KWN started off as an informal network and was registered three years later, with substantial TA from STAR, related to the development of network structure, by-laws and strategic plan.

Over the past three years, KWN has shown outstanding performance both in terms of its own structuring and internal communications as well as its advocacy initiatives, including several pre-election campaigns, campaigns against domestic violence, trafficking in women, and monitoring of the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 demanding that special attention be paid to the rights of women in post-conflict settings.

STAR's support for Serbian women's organizations in Kosovo was often extremely challenging, due to lack of freedom of movement and breakdown in communication, caused by violent incidents. TA provision relied on Prishtina staff as well as staff from Belgrade Office and trainers from women's groups in Serbia.

In 2003-04, STAR, alongside UNIFEM, facilitated the formation and working groups of Kosovo Women's Lobby (KWL), a loose network of 26 women leaders from political parties, media and NGOs. KWL's peak activities included the Kosovo wide Electoral Law Reform Campaign, carried out together with KWN, the Coalition for Electoral Law Reform, Reforma 2004, and KACI Network. Kosovo Women's Lobby was also a key partner to NDI and STAR in the organization of a national conference "Women's Leadership-Strategies for Promoting Women in Political Decision-making", held in June 2004 and resulting in the Platform for Action to Empower Women in Political Decision-making (a key component of conference publication co-funded and prepared by STAR with assistance from UNIFEM and FES). Over the past two years, KWL is focusing on the inclusion of women in status talks of Kosovo, a political priority identified by Kosovar women's movement as a whole.

In the case of Kosovo Women's Business Network, STAR was the main driver of network formation and formalization, as it grew out of STAR-organized, first

Kosovo-wide conference “Women and the Economy”, held in November 2001. Since its formation in March 2002 until STAR’s program completion in December 2004, KBWN was strongly supported to register, develop its structure, strategic documents and communication strategy, engage in cross-border networking, hire professional staff and prepare project proposals in order to ensure its sustainability. At present, it seems that the network is not functional, due to lack of collective leadership capacity to undertake its coordination and joint programming, especially upon STAR’s departure. As a former STAR staff has pointed out, the formalization of KBWN was a premature endeavour, yet it did result in a network of contacts among women economists and entrepreneurs, whose understanding and commitment to gender-analysis of economic relations is visible in whatever they do within their own settings.

B-H and Kosovo business networks bear an important lesson in terms of engaging in establishing networks. The relatively low level of policy impact these women’s networks have had in their countries suggests that in areas with weak or non-existing tradition of women’ organising significantly more attention should be given to individual and organisational strengthening and support before embarking on formal network establishment. Informal networking efforts make sense and should be supported for as long as it takes indigenous organisations to internalize the need for establishing a formal network. Networks that were established and formalized too early, despite their best intentions, lack the sense of ownership among local actors, and are often perceived as an imposed solution, created to the benefit of specific few individuals. Lack of ownership often leads to the stalemate or network’s dissolution after donor funding and technical assistance dries out, but perhaps, more dangerously spreads the perception in the wider society of networks as unimportant and insignificant in bringing about social change.

### **5.3. WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY CAPACITY**

“STAR had the capacity to find strong and interesting women and help them develop”, says a former staff member. This applies equally to staff members and partners. Most of former staff members (especially local women) report that working in STAR had a significant positive impact on their personal and professional development, ranging from increased self esteem, to skills that today enable them to run their own successful organisations or act as important stakeholders in national or international governmental institutions and INGOs involved in policy development and implementation. The same staff member says “never before have I met so many capable women as STAR staff between 2000 and 2002. I think that at one point we were “over-empowered”, thus hard to manage.”

STAR’s investment into women’s leadership ranged from formal education and training to trusting individuals and organisations in knowing what is best for their communities, which included a conscious license to experiment and make mistakes as part of a learning process. The latter is key both in terms of individual and organisational growth, and in terms of civil society development as whole, which unlike the business or governmental sector should have the permission to make mistakes, due to the positive ratio of successful vs. unsuccessful social innovations.

The illustrations of the unexpected benefits of seemingly unsuccessful projects are several local income-generation projects supported by STAR in late 1990's in Croatia. On the whole, STAR's support for such projects has been assessed as probably the only superfluous program component in Croatia, from the perspective of former staff and several project partners. These projects lacked organizational capacity, both on the part of implementing local women's NGOs and STAR, which, besides sub-granting, did not, at the time, have the particular TA expertise to help the groups develop adequate business competencies, especially marketing. However, their positive impact on reconciliatory efforts must not be left unacknowledged. The project "80 greenhouses", implemented in Baranja by the Centre for Peace Osijek, was the first to enable communication between women who fled the UNTAES<sup>9</sup> region and those who stayed, through a joint economic interest. Some of the women involved later co-founded BIOPA, currently one of the largest associations for organic agriculture in Croatia. Similarly, the laundromat within the Women's Club Pakrac played a significant role in terms of getting women of Croatian and Serbian nationality together and communicating in a war-torn community. Additionally, these projects helped position NGO leaders in their communities, ensuring support from their fellow citizens and, in time, respect and cooperation from local authorities. It therefore seems fair to argue that early income generating projects had positive unexpected results in years to come, both in terms of individual women's leadership and organisational sustainability, which applies equally to STAR itself and its partner-organisations. One of the important lessons learned from this experiment was STAR's future focus on the creation of a more conducive policy and social environment for women's entrepreneurship in Croatia and, in that context, provision of support to women's business organizations and women's NGOs advocating for women's economic rights, as opposed to running short-term semi-business operations.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, STAR/Delphi managed the Microenterprise Education and Empowerment Team (MEET), funded initially by the Bosnian Women's Initiative, with the purpose of assisting new and developing existing microcrediting programs for women. At the time, microcrediting was considered "one of the most dramatic development success stories in post-Daytonian Bosnia and Herzegovina."<sup>10</sup> MEET project, in addition to direct technical assistance to microcrediting programs and microenterprise development, engaged in advocacy on behalf of women by monitoring their access to microcredits.<sup>11</sup> While more focused research would be necessary to assess the current relevance of STAR's involvement in microcrediting programs as "the development success story" in B-H, it is certain that STAR's activities in this area produced some long-lasting effects, especially in terms of successfully placing women's entrepreneurship on the political agendas of the YSS.

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<sup>9</sup> United Nation's Transition Authority in Eastern Slavonia

<sup>10</sup> The STAR Project and Delphi International, MEET Project: "Special Report on Women's Participation Levels in Microcredit Programs in BiH", November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. the STAR "Special Report" emphasised that "the average percentage of loans made to women is under 26%, despite the fact that there are twice as many women in Bosnia as men. The average loan size for men is 4,523 DM, 20% higher than the average loan size for women of 3,522. Through these microcredit programs, Bosnian men have received a total of 4,707,300 DM, whereas Bosnian women have only received 1,568,640 DM."

In Croatia, joint advocacy effort by WNGOs, women politicians, women in decision-making positions within institutions and business-women resulted in institutionalized affirmative action measures such as local government subsidized loans and subsidized training for women entrepreneurs. These efforts also significantly influenced the level of awareness about women's issues especially among those responsible for developing or implementing local development projects within public institutions. An example of successful awareness raising is evident in the prioritized status of women entrepreneurs in business incubator space allocation tenders in PORIN - regional development agency in Rijeka, Croatia, owned and managed by the local authorities.

When it comes to advocacy, there is a distinction between the first and second phase of programming. Between 1995 and 1998 STAR invested heavily in the **advocacy capacity of individual women leaders and women's organisations**. The most significant advocacy related activities in this phase are enabling 18 women from the YSS to participate in the month-long International Policy Advocacy (IPA) training in the US. Although, as already mentioned, the initial intentions to form new organisations failed, most training participants are today still very active and successful in advocating for social changes in their countries. In addition, IPA training participants have written the first public policy advocacy manual in local languages, which proved to be of immense importance to many advocacy initiatives in the YSS, beyond advocacy for women's political and economic rights. Besides providing practical advice on engaging in advocacy activities, the manual is also one of the earliest attempts to deal with the issue of "translating" and understanding western (mostly American) terminology in local languages and contexts.

This first phase advocacy-related activities focused on women's political rights and their positioning, through conflict resolution and reconciliation activities, as well as direct policy impacts, such as changes in criminal codes relating to domestic violence. Individual support and advocacy skills gained by women politicians probably helped them in positioning themselves within their parties and in various institutions, but it is impossible to make a direct link between STAR's activities and their former and/or current positions, taking into account many other international and local NGOs providing similar training and support. However, STAR did provide those in positions with relevant research that they used in their advocacy efforts for policy changes at the level of their institutions.

In the second phase of its programming (1999-2002/04), STAR's advocacy-related activities focused more on **direct advocacy of STAR staff in collaboration with partner organisations and women leaders** for women's economic rights and positioning. In this phase, STAR funded and/or conducted research and published publications, organized conferences and cross-sectoral events in an effort to engage as high a number of women as possible in improving women's economic position in the YSS.

Most impact in this sense can be attributed to the STAR funded research on women's economic status in B-H, and numerous other policy papers since, that are widely used as relevant sources of data in advocating for the advancement of women. E.g. findings of "Because We Are Women - Socio-economic status of Women in B-H" (2003) are quoted in the shadow report on CEDAW implementation in B-H (2004) and also recently in the International Herald Tribune. Similarly, in Croatia, STAR

staff-conducted research into women's entrepreneurship helped introduce the term into official policy papers and provided background for developing subsidized credit lines and training for women entrepreneurs. Several STAR Serbia funded publications, e.g. "Motherhood or Parenthood" or "Women in Serbia. Are we discriminated against?" have been used as advocacy tools to raise awareness about perpetuating patriarchal patterns with raising children, their impact on the social and economic position of women or about women's position in the labour market and the need to organize through trade unions. STAR has also published a compendium "Women's Economic and Political Advocacy" presenting Macedonian case studies, hence creating yet another channel of exchange of locally-generated knowledge and experience, beyond the scope of its program.

In Macedonia, STAR's intensive multi-level focus on advocacy over the period 2000-2002 proved outstandingly successful, especially in comparison to the initial situation, as assessed in final project evaluation report from December 1998, when the advocacy capacity of individual women leaders (IPA graduates) and organizations was still inadequate for systematic transfer of skills and mobilization of wide women's activist community. In contrast to that period, at the end of 2002, STAR's contribution was instrumental in the formation of five informal, cross-sectoral advocacy initiatives at the municipal level, focused on issues such as access to job retraining, access to credit, creation of municipal women's political caucuses and gender equality commissions.

The combination of supporting both national and local advocacy for women's political participation has proved successful in terms of creating the critical mass of women politicians actively demanding greater representation of women's interests as well as leadership within their own political parties, and who are at the same time ready to engage in inter-party and cross-sectoral collaboration around women's issues. The example of Dragica Miloševska illustrates the value of enhancing women's leadership in a cross-sectoral context:

*I collaborated with STAR as a member of the Regional Advisory Board, representing women politicians from Macedonia. After all trainings, meetings, seminars and conferences organized by STAR I have advanced my position in my political party. Today, I am the secretary general of women's section LIPAZ and a member of the central board of the Liberal party, president of the women's section in my municipality and member of the City Council in Skopje. In the world of business, I was the initiator of our family's business. Today, the company Plimont is successful, operating both in Macedonia and Serbia. I have been president of the women's NGO "Women's Action" for 7 years, which empowers women's politicians and promotes women's human rights, in partnership with other NGOs.*

In Kosovo, STAR acted in a complex activist and international development setting where women's advocacy was already well developed, especially in the context of Albanian peaceful resistance movement of the 1990's. In the period 2000-2004, STAR was, in synergy with other agencies, especially OSCE, NDI and UNIFEM, involved in practically every advocacy initiative undertaken by local networks, and has in that way surely contributed to the enhancement of advocacy capacity of the women's movement in Kosovo, especially KWN, which is nowadays extremely outspoken on issues ranging from domestic violence, formulation and more

importantly implementation of gender equality policy, women's political participation, with special focus on the inclusion of women in Kosovo peace process.

STAR focused on long-term confidence and skill-building of individual women, encouraging them to engage in dialogue across sectors. As Wenny Kusuma has noted:

*Through trainings, we did a lot of bridging of divides between women in political parties, media and NGOs and we modeled partnership building as we ourselves sought to implement all our activities in collaboration with other local and international organizations. Perhaps the most important lesson that I learned working with STAR was the value of supporting individual women and understanding that the lines between sectors are not rigid. That is something that I use now in UNIFEM – once you have a woman leader, she will be a leader wherever she moves. Converting the freedom of speech into action, which is what we tried to make happen, supporting women to take up their political right to engage.*

Not all of the key activities yielded sustainable results, yet STAR, as confirmed by former staff and project partners, definitely put the women's economic rights on the agenda of women's NGOs, several key economic development institutions and local governments.

National and regional conferences and numerous expertise exchanges, including the ties built between members of STAR's Regional Advisory Board (RAB), served as catalysts for brokering new relationships and exchanging experiences about successful policy solutions or programmes elsewhere in the region that could and were used as a powerful advocacy tools. Without going into detailed overview of all the national and regional exchanges, here we point only to the increased scope of influence as illustrated by comparing a meeting of Belgrade and Zagreb feminists, held in Istria in 1995, and the 2002 Femisfera conference. The meeting in Istria gathered 17 feminists involved in antiwar movements in Croatia and Serbia, with the specific aim to ensure a safe space for a dialogue on different perspectives on the wars in YSS. STAR supported the meeting at the direct request of the women involved, who by that time have been meeting in various international conferences where they often had no chance to explore their different war experiences in more depth<sup>12</sup>. Seven years later, Femisfera engaged more than 200 women, from all of the YSS and representing a variety of cross-sectoral interests, in an intense dialogue on issues ranging from entrepreneurship and labour rights to combating media stereotyping, establishing functioning gender equality frameworks at the state level and participation of women in politics and in peace negotiations. The importance of the event, and its difference compared to many of the earlier regional gatherings is

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<sup>12</sup> An account of the importance of the meeting at the time can be found in the article by Vesna Kesić and Lepa Mladenović "Smijeh, suze i politika. Dijalog – kako to rade žene" published for the first time in *Feminističke sveske* 5/6 (available at [www.womenngo.org.yu](http://www.womenngo.org.yu)) and widely circulated in feminist media (e.g. an English translation "Laughter, Tears and Politics. Dialogue – How Women Do It" can be found in *Women Recollecting Memories. The Center for Woman War Victims ten Years later*, Zagreb, 2003. or on the Women in Black website [www.zeneucnom.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=52&Itemid=17](http://www.zeneucnom.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=52&Itemid=17)

well described by dr. Marina Blagojević:

*The STAR Conference held in Poreč in 2002 represented a turning point in women's regional cooperation in the post-Yugoslav region. A shift occurred from declarative political rhetoric about regional cooperation among civil society to concrete, joint projects. Women granted themselves the right to shake off the past and raise their sights toward the future. This was a result of all the previous efforts that made up the diversified network of STAR's regional activities. From the accumulation of all earlier women's coalitions and misunderstandings. And ultimately from a steady investment in communication. [...] Femisfera ushered in an entirely new phase of women's cooperation in the post-Yugoslav space: a transition from passive, confused, traumatized women who were the objects of someone else's help to proactive, wise, well-trained, energetic, sensitive women creating forward-looking strategic partnerships for woman-sized globalization." (STAR Final Report, 2002)*

### **Advocacy for Gender Equality Mechanisms**

The establishment of gender equality mechanisms, as part of comprehensive state policies towards advancing the position of women, is an important part of the Beijing platform of action. The arrival of STAR to YSS coincided with the preparations for the Beijing conference and one of STAR's first activities was to fund NGOs' participation in the Conference. The Platform which demands that states take responsibility for ensuring gender equality has been accepted as a framework of action by the governments in the YSS. As a result most of the countries in the YSS have various forms of institutionalized gender equality mechanisms, although they have been developed and adopted at different pace, depending upon the socio-political context of each country.

STAR's conference in Poreč in 2000 yielded the Poreč Platform of Action, a specific framework for gender equality in the YSS advocating the establishment of responsible institutional mechanisms for promoting gender equality. Today, all STAR countries have some form of institutionalized GEMs with different levels of political power and influence, as well as different sources of funding. In terms of STAR's contribution to the development of GEMs, it differs from country to country.

In Croatia, the establishment of GEMs can be linked to the increased advocacy skills of STAR's partner organisations and support to women politicians who gained access to decision-making positions in 2000, as well as informal networks established during the first phase of STAR's programming. In contrast, although Serbia (with the exception of Vojvodina) has less developed GEMs, STAR's contribution is more significant in terms of direct advocacy for GEMs where STAR acted in synergy with other international actors such as NDI, GTF and the OSCE. In Montenegro, STAR's Regional Advisory Board Member, who helped to form a Gender Equality Commission, was appointed as Head of the Gender Equality Office of the Government of Montenegro established in 2003.

B-H has a very developed structure of institutionalized GEMs, largely due to its complex governance structure established by the international community that is

investing into mainstreaming gender equality as part of the democratisation process. The international community largely funds B-H GEMs and they employ approx. 3000 people, although representatives of the NGO community largely question their functioning. In terms of STAR's contribution to their development, it is difficult to discern it from the practice of international actors in B-H.

In Kosovo, STAR acted in synergy with UNIFEM and in coordination with KWN throughout the process of establishing, strengthening and monitoring GEMs. In the initial stages of GEM development in 2002, STAR's TA contributed to the establishment of the Gender Equality Committee in the Parliament and the drafting of the Gender National Action Plan. Substantial TA was provided to KWN in 2003, in order to ensure KWN's impact on the final draft of the Gender Equality Law. Currently, KWN is engaged in the design of the second GNAP and monitoring of the Gender Equality Law. In Macedonia, the only institutional mechanism at the national level is the Department for the Promotion of Gender Equality within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, but STAR's contribution to its establishment is unclear.

In sum, when it comes to gender equality mechanisms, STAR's overall contribution may best be described as acting in synergy with numerous other actors to create conditions for cross-sectoral networking that enabled fruitful exchange between civil society leaders and women in political parties and decision-making positions. As pointed by a former STAR Serbia coordinator "without involvement of women's organizations supported by STAR it could have happened that there are GEMs but without any feminist perspectives." Future development of GEMs in the region will depend precisely on the advocacy capacity of women's organizations and women's networks, to which STAR definitely contributed by its numerous activities.

## **6. PROPOSED NEXT STEPS – IN-DEPTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Considering the longevity and broadness of the STAR project, we suggest a highly selective and focused approach for the next phase of the impact assessment. The next phase would need to provide an in-depth insight into the select processes related to (1) organizational strengthening, (2) networking and (3) advocacy and leadership - identified in this inception report as key areas of STAR's impact related to women's economic and political empowerment in YSS. Expected audience for the final report would include development agencies, individual project leaders and women organizers working in post-conflict settings around the world as well as women activists in the YSS region currently engaged in collective action aimed at women's political and economic empowerment.

It is proposed that each key impact area be covered by 2-4 case studies (wherever possible, presenting comparative analysis) on the basis of protocols developed for each specific impact area. In that way, the impact assessment would result in 6-10 in-depth studies of the dynamic of local women's organizing supported by an international development partner, with specific lessons learned formulated from the perspective of donor/support agency as well as local women's organizations. The case studies would help discern STAR's intervention logic and methodology, as well as its specific effects on the local initiatives.

In order to alleviate and accelerate the preparation of case studies, as well as for the purpose of potential future research and learning, it is recommended that the STAR Network/WL create a project archive that would include and make available project reports, evaluations and publications, as important sources of data for the history of women's organizing in YSS. We recommend restructuring the STAR Network webpage so that it gives an overview of all the reports, evaluations and publications available on-line. It would be especially important to make available on-line publications in local languages (e.g. The Advocacy Workbook is currently available on-line in English only). In addition, it would be necessary to systematize all information on grant provision in all countries, in order to create a multifunctional data base (this information is vital for exploring various questions about STAR's impact, e.g. rural and regional outreach; overview of women's issues supported; intensity of funding per country and time period etc.).

It is suggested that the preparation of case studies be entrusted to a regional team of action researchers, ideally in collaboration with women's studies centres or programs (either in academia or NGO settings) in each country. The team would consist of experienced feminist social scientists, including the STAR regional director and some other former staff that would be assisted by several students. In such a manner, the impact assessment methodology would reflect the very logic of STAR's intervention – identifying opportunities for further competency building of local feminists – and would at the same time ensure adequate balance of familiarity and distance from the actual initiatives being studied. The criterion for the selection of team leaders would be their knowledge of the women's movement in a particular country, experience with action research and qualitative methodology as well as lack of direct engagement in the initiatives selected for case studies. It would be most valuable to produce the texts both in English and in local languages.

The selection of case study topics would be based on the following criteria: (1) relevance of a specific initiative in terms of STAR's impact, (2) relevance of a specific initiative for understanding STAR's logic of intervention and approach; (3) accessibility of information and documentation and (4) estimated relevance for current women's organizing in a particular country or region as a whole.

A comparative approach to the analysis of specific cases is strongly suggested, wherever applicable, in order to get a better understanding of contextual factors influencing STAR's strategy and outcomes as well as those aspects of intervention determinant of a certain level of impact. A case study on STAR's contribution to the development of advocacy competencies of 18 individual women activists from the entire region of YSS, through IPA program is also suggested, in order to shed light on the relevance of investing into individuals, an approach that has been important in STAR's overall strategy, whose relevance is still somewhat doubted by most development programs in favour of project or organization-focused interventions.

In addition to individual or comparative studies of country-specific cases, it is suggested that two case studies focus on the broader impact of STAR – the contribution to the reconciliation process at the regional level (women's activist relationships in particular) and the advocacy undertaken by STAR itself in the policy and donor communities in the U.S. which is deemed unique and most valuable for the promotion of the role of women in post-conflict, transition settings as resources, as opposed to victims. The former is also linked with STAR's unique fundraising

strategy of combining public and private funds in order to ensure the support for peace and democratization-oriented women's activism regardless of the current state of international policy in respect to a particular regime (i.e. FRY during 1990's; emergency relief via Kosovo Women's Fund).

The following topics are suggested based on this initial review of STAR's impact:

### **1. STAR Approach to Organizational Capacity-building**

The focus of these case studies would be on the STAR's strategy to organizational capacity-building and the analysis of the key contributions and effects, as well as lessons learned from the perspective of former STAR staff and the local organizations that received STAR's support, either through small grants or TA.

*Proposed topics:*

- "Meeting Women Where They Are": The Impact of Tailored TA Provision in Kosovo and Macedonia
- The strategy of sub-granting as knowledge building: STAR's subgranting schemes in Croatia and Serbia

### **2. Networking**

The case studies would provide a detailed picture of the dynamics of network creation, its broadening and, where applicable, formalization, in respect to the specific political and activist contexts in which it has arisen. The particularities of STAR contribution would be identified and assessed, in respect to their relevance and effectiveness. A comparative approach is recommended in order to highlight the specific challenges faced by STAR – informal vs. formal network support; encouragement of inter-ethnic networking and cooperation; initiating new vs. supporting existent networks. The lessons learned will be drawn for the purpose of informing the development community on the complexities of both network sustainability and support.

*Proposed topics:*

- Nurturing feminist relationships across war-stricken borders: informal regional networking
- Supporting inter-ethnic networking at the time of political crisis – supporting ANTIKO, Macedonia and cross-ethnic networking in Kosovo
- Supporting broad, country-wide women's networks – a comparative analysis of STAR approach to Kosovo Women's Network, Croatia Women's Network and Women's Movement – Women's Network Serbia
- The benefits and limitations of informal cross-sectoral networking: supporting local economic networks in Croatia
- New agendas – new networks: the comparative analysis of issue-based networks Bosnia-Herzegovina Women's Economic Network and Kosovo Women's Business Network

### **3. Advocacy and Leadership**

Each of the advocacy case studies would present the context and the process of problem definition, actors' mobilization and actual policy changes brought about by a

particular advocacy initiative. STAR's specific contributions would be identified. The lessons learned would be formulated from the perspective of donor and implementer as well as the advocacy initiatives themselves.

*Proposed topics:*

- Investing in Individual Women – The Relevance of IPA Program to the enhancement of Women's Advocacy Competencies in YSS
- Raising Awareness of YSS Women as Resources for Peace and Democratization in the U.S: policy and democratic communities
- Sv. Nikole Advocacy Initiative
- Making an Issue Visible: Women and the Economy Conference, Kosovo
- A Long Road to Institutionalization: GEM Campaign, 2002, Serbia
- Enhancing Women's Access to Capital in B-H and Croatia

## **Appendix I: Proposal Work Plan**

### **Proposal Work Plan for Impact Assessment Study of the World Learning's Strategy, Training, Advocacy and Resources (STAR) Network in Croatia, B-H, Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo**

Submitted on August 1, 2006

The purpose of the study is to assess how the STAR strategy—civil society building through the development of community and regional networks—has impacted on civil society partners, local communities, government institutions and cross-border cooperation among the civil societies in the five Yugoslav successor states (including Kosovo as an UN administered territory). The assessment will be conducted in two phases. This proposal outlines the objectives, methodology and the implementation plan of the Phase I, and suggested methodology for the Phase II.

#### **1. PHASE I - PILOT PHASE (October 2006)**

The pilot phase will include an analytical review of the STAR documentation, an input provided by the former STAR staff and key partners in each of the countries/territories. The pilot phase report will seek to identify the most important legacy of the STAR in each of the countries/territories and regionally. The legacy may refer to specific organizational forms (e.g. formal and informal networks, individual organizations), learning tools (e.g. publications, manuals) or other practices and products where STAR's contribution can be clearly demonstrated. The pilot phase report will include suggestions for the follow-up phase and the format of the final report.

**Methodology:** review of STAR documentation (including final program reports for per country and the entire program, M/E matrix and evaluation reports (internal and external), key program publications in English and local languages, follow-up reports (if any), list (including contacts) of STAR staff, advisory board members, key program associates and partners for the whole period of presence in the region (1994-2004.); former STAR staff survey and interviews with 2 to 3 key partners in each of the countries/territories.

#### **2. PHASE II (November-December 2006)**

Upon the completion of the pilot phase, the WL/STAR will decide on the objectives and the most appropriate methodology for the follow-up phase. The following is methodology suggested at this stage by MAP Consulting:

Based on the findings from the pilot phase the consultants will prepare case studies illustrating the key lessons learned in each of the countries/territories. In order to develop the final report as a potential learning tool for future WL/STAR programming, it is suggested to prepare an equal number of 'success' and 'failure' (or 'less-than-success') 'stories'. The case studies will seek to discern STAR strategies from contextual factors that contributed to the specific outcome, including guidelines for context analysis and appropriate strategies development potentially applicable in other countries. The case studies preparation will involve: field visits, in-depth interviews

with key informants, review of documentation produced by selected network, organization or individual. Whenever possible, the interviews will take place at the premises of target organizations, in order to enable additional insight into their organizational set-up. The consultants will also acquire additional resource materials on each organization the extent of which will depend on the readiness and resourcefulness of interviewees.

## **Appendix II: Documents reviewed**

### Documentation on STAR Network<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Submitted by STAR Regional director Jill Benderly or downloaded from <http://dec.usaid.gov>.

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*Croatia Trafficking Prevention Activity 2006*. Zagreb. ([www.worldlearning.org/wlid/star/docs/star\\_croatia\\_anti-trafficking\\_2006.pdf](http://www.worldlearning.org/wlid/star/docs/star_croatia_anti-trafficking_2006.pdf))

Čopić, Sanja et al 2001. *Žene u Srbiji. Da li smo diskriminirane*. Beograd: Sekcija žena UGS „Nezavisnost“, ICFTU CEE Women's Network

*Fe-mail za znalice 1977*. Zagreb: Star Project.

Gradjanska inicijativa na ženi Sv. Nikole. s.a. *Patišta i možnosti – sama do sopstven biznis*.

*International Funding Guide 1998*. Zagreb: Star Project Delphi International.

Kervatin, Miriam, ed. 1998. *Javno zagovaranje: Žene za društvene promjene u zemljama sljednicama bivše Jugoslavije*. . Zagreb: STAR Project Delphi International

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## **Appendix III: Questions for staff members and partners**

### **Questions for STAR staff**

Note: *Questions for STAR staff included general questions on STAR's impact and a separate set of questions aimed at clarification of specific issues/activities mentioned in project documentation. Country-specific questions are available upon request.*

#### General questions on STAR's impact:

1. How long and at what time did you work for STAR?
2. What do you consider to be STAR's critical contribution to increased engagement of women's organisations in advocating for women's political rights in the country you worked in and in the region (FYS)?
3. What do you consider to be STAR's critical contribution to increased engagement of women's organisations in advocating for women's economic rights in the country you worked in and in the region (FYS)?
4. Can you name several specific STAR activities that contributed to women's political and economic empowerment? Please name at least one activity relevant to the local, national and regional levels?
5. Which among STAR's activities do you consider most important for networking women in your country?
6. Which among STAR's activities do you consider most important for networking women in the region?
7. What do you consider unique in STAR's approach? Given the perspective, which activities were superfluous and/or made your work more difficult?
8. How has working in STAR influenced your personal and/or professional life? Where do you work now, and in what position?

### **Questions for key partners**

1. What do you consider to be STAR's critical contribution to increased engagement of women's organisations in advocating for women's political rights in the country you worked in and in the region (FYS)?
2. What do you consider to be STAR's critical contribution to increased engagement of women's organisations in advocating for women's economic rights in the country you worked in and in the region (FYS)?
3. Can you name several specific STAR activities that contributed to women's political and economic empowerment? Please name at least one activity relevant to the local, national and regional levels.

4. Which among STAR's activities do you consider most important for networking women in your country?
5. Which among STAR's activities do you consider most important for networking women in the region?
6. What do you consider unique in STAR's approach?
7. Has participating in STAR's programmes and activities influenced your personal and/or professional life? How? Which activities did you take part in and in what time span?

## Appendix IV: Respondents<sup>14</sup>

### WRITTEN RESPONSES

1. Aferdita Haxhijaha Imeri (Macedonia Country Coordinator, 1997-2002), Director of Project Coordination Unit with the Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science, Macedonia
2. Ana Kajevska-Miškovska (Macedonia programme assistant, 1996-1998), graduate student in sociology, gender and sexuality in Amsterdam, the Netherlands
3. Biserka Momčinović, former STAR Regional Advisory Board member, Women's Group Poreč, former WNC coordinator, Croatia
4. Dana Stinson (Kosovo coordinator, 1999); private consultant, currently working on a Kosovo security sector reform project
5. Delina Fico (Kosovo coordinator, 2003-2005), Public Outreach and Organizational Development director for Threshold Country program in Albania, implemented by Chemonics International; served as Board member of Kosovo Women's Network, Kosova Gender Studies Center and women's association Refleksione in Albania
6. Dragica Miloševska, former STAR Regional Advisory Board member, party official, entrepreneur and women's rights activist, Macedonia
7. Edina Hadžiahmetović (Bosnia program coordinator, 2001-2004), Procurement Specialist for Governance Accountability Project (GAP) by AED, USAID and SIDA, B-H
8. Gjuner Nebiu, Women Civic Initiative ANTIKO, Macedonia
9. Gordana Čorić (regional program director, 1999-2002), independent consultant, Croatia
10. Gordana Stojanović, IPA participant, Association for Peace Baranja, Croatia
11. Jill Benderly (STAR Network co-director, 1994-present), STAR regional director and SIT Study Abroad Academic Director, Croatia

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<sup>14</sup> Several former STAR staff and partners responded noting that they are not familiar with the current developments in countries where they used to work or with apologies for not being able to respond in the given timeframe (e.g. Edith Johnson, former Macedonia country coordinator, currently working as development expert in Jakarta, Indonesia; Slađana Mandić and Zorica Trifunović, both former STAR Serbia staff, Marina Blagojević, Biljana Maletin etc.)

12. Julia DeMichalis (Kosovo coordinator, 2002-2003), chief of party of Parliament Support Project in Morocco
13. Lejla Spaho, BHWEN coordinator, B-H
14. Leal Stegal (STAR Network co-director, 1994-2004), president of the Social Change International, United States
15. Marta Turk, president of the Slovene Association of Entrepreneurs, Slovenia
16. Milica Minić, AWIN co-coordinator, independent consultant, Serbia
17. Milosava Torlić, Women's Section of B-H Union of Independent Trade Unions (Sekcija žena SSSBiH), former BHWEN member, B-H
18. Mirna Karzen (program manager DC, 1999-2002), program associate for Urban Institute local government reform project, Croatia
19. Natasa Goronja (Bosnia econ program asst, 1997-1998), analyst with the World Bank's CGAP, US
20. Nedžma Dženanović (Bosnia program assistant, 1996-1998), foreign affairs advisor, government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, B-H
21. Radmila Sandeva, Women's Association Sv. Nikole, Macedonia
22. Selma Hadžihalilović (BATCOM coordinator, 2002-present), B-H
23. Silva Žufić, Women's Group Poreč, Croatia
24. Spomenka Rakušić, senior advisor at the Ministry of Economy, Croatia
25. Vesna Kesić, co-founder of the Centre for Women War Victims and B.a.B.e., STAR's consultant in the inception phase, Croatia
26. Vesna Teršelič, director of Documenta, previously coordinator of the Antiwar Campaign, co-trainer in MoR, Croatia
27. Violeta Novoselec (finance assistant, 2000-2002), World Learning PTP START Project, Croatia

#### **INTERVIEWS (in person and via phone)**

1. Aleksandra Vladislavljevic (Serbia asst/coordinator, 1998-2002), manager of the USAID sponsored project for the development of entrepreneurship in Serbia (SEDP), Serbia
2. Biserka Fižulić, President of the Businesswomen's association Krug, Croatia
3. Blanka Glavica Ječmenica, Varaždin County Office for Economy, Croatia

4. Bobana Macanović, Autonomous Women's Centre, activist and financial officer, BCIF Grant Committee member, Serbia
5. Bojana Genov, WNC Coordinator, IPA participant, Croatia
6. Darinka Hajduk-Vučić, Varaždin County Office for Economy, Croatia
7. Laurance Hovde, co-founder of Women at Work and Vojvodina Women's Initiative for Self-Employment, France
8. Ljiljana Vidučić, Economic faculty University of Split, Croatia
9. Miriam Kervatin, Public Policy Workbook editor, IPA participants, member of the Gender Equality Commission in Primorsko-Goranska Županija, Croatia
10. Nataša Milenković (Macedonia asst, Serbia asst, 1997-1999), independent consultant, Serbia
11. Nuria Vendrells (Kosovo assoc, 2001-2002), social worker, Ireland
12. Sanja Sarnavka, B.a.B.e. Coordinator, IPA Participant, Croatia
13. Snježana Matejčić, journalist, MoR participant, Croatia
14. Wenny Kusuma (Kosovo coordinator, 2000-2002), UNIFEM SEE program manager
15. Željana Buntić Pejaković, Women's Group Domine, member of Gender Equality Commission in Split County, Croatia
16. Zvijezdana Schulz Vugrin (program assistant/Cro coordinator, 1995-1998), executive director of the Association for Civil Society Development SMART, Croatia

## Appendix V: Overview of STAR Network grants to WNGOs in the YSS

**Table I: Total amount of STAR Network grants to WNGOs per year**

Year	Total amount in USD	Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Countries
1995	91355	4	22839	Croatia, B-H
1996	367397	25	14696	Croatia, B-H, Macedonia, FRY (Serbia, Kosovo)
1997	161293	18	8961	Croatia, B-H, Macedonia, FRY (Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo)
1998	338975	74	4581	Croatia, B-H, Mac, FRY (Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo)
1999/2000*	331276	28	11831	Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, B-H
2001	116020	22	5274	Serbia
2002	58902	12	4909	Serbia
	<i>1465218</i>	<i>183</i>		

\*According to the Selected Grant List for STAR Network Women's Fund (formerly Kosovo Women's Fund) in which the grants are not distinguished by year. The list also includes amounts awarded by other organizations and transferred through STAR to the local recipients (e.g. 100,000 USD awarded by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee for general support to Motrat Qiriazi or 20,900 USD by Urgent Action Fund for various projects).

**Table II: Total amount of STAR Network grants to WNGOs per country**

Country	Total amount in grants for WNGOs (USD)	Number of grants	Average amount per grant
Croatia	448014	36	12445
Serbia	324608	77	4216
B-H	254456	20	12723
Kosovo	248620	14	17759
Macedonia	174100	31	5616
Montenegro	15420	5	3084
	<b>1465218</b>	<b>183</b>	

There is no unique database of all STAR grants and due to differences in reporting for specific programmes we cannot be sure that the data collected here are completely accurate. Given the importance of STAR Network as one of the few women's donors in the region, the second phase of the impact assessment would require completing the data on direct grants given to WNGOs as a basis for an analysis of the grant-making impact on WNGOs development. If possible, these data would need to be aggregated with other women's donors in the region.

The tables are based on the list of grants (submitted as a separate document in Excel format) compiled from the following sources:

Appendix K to the Polly, Waneen (December 1998.) Evaluation after fourth and final year of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia strategies, training and advocacy for reconciliation project (known as the Delphi/STAR project)

Appendix J to the Polly, Waneen (December 1998.) Evaluation after fourth and final year of the Bosnia-Herzegovina strategies, training and advocacy for reconciliation project (known as the Delphi/STAR project)

Appendices J and K to the Polly, Waneen (December 1998.) Evaluation after fourth and final year of the Croatia strategies, training and advocacy for reconciliation project (known as the Delphi/STAR project)

Appendix H Polly, Waneen (March 1999.): Evaluation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia strategic training for advocacy and reconciliation project (known as Delphi/Star project)

Annex 11. (Serbia Grant Table) to STAR/World Learning (November 30, 2002): The STAR Network of World Learning Women's Leadership Program for Democratic Social Change in Southeastern Europe, Final Report, October 1, 2000 – October 30, 2002.

Selected Grant List for STAR Network Women's Fund (formerly Kosovo Women's Fund) <http://www.worldlearning.org/wlid/star/partnerships/kosovo.html> (accessed on October 15, 2006.)

Subgrants list, dated 23AUG97, hard copy document (submitted by Jill Benderly on November 10th, 2006)

Grants list: 1995-1997, 22 January 1997, hard copy document (submitted by Jill Benderly on November 10th, 2006)