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MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN RHETORIC AND REALITY: A TALE OF THREE COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Multi-stakeholder engagement has been promoted over the last few years not only as a set of possible technical solutions, but as a fundamental plank in a revised approach to the pursuit of the goals of public sector organizations. The underlying assumption is that the processes and institutions of traditional democratic representation are not fully able to generate adequate solutions when dealing with multi-faceted issues and fragmented policy environments.

As with many other “miracle drugs” over the last couple of decades, also the theory and practice of multi-stakeholder engagement grew in the West and was then transplanted into Central and Eastern Europe by policy advisers, consultants and trainers, often with an explicit backing by international organizations. In some cases, international organizations did more than simply facilitate mimetic isomorphism: they mandated the adoption of multi-stakeholder engagement. This has been the case with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which from the very beginning required that applications for funding were submitted by a multi-stakeholder “Country Coordination Mechanism” (CCM), meant in particular to ensure the involvement of the populations affected by the three diseases.

The paper will compare how three countries responded to the requirements of the Global Fund by analyzing the structure and functioning patterns of the CCMs established in Bulgaria, Russia and Ukraine. This comparison appears relevant, because the three countries share a common past and similar institutional framework, and all focused primarily on HIV grants, shaping their CCMs accordingly. On the other hand, for different reasons they represent “extreme” situations: Bulgaria

is considered by the Global Fund as the best performed in the world in terms of grant implementation; Russia is one of the very few countries which resorted to a fully “non-governmental” CCM; and Ukraine was among the very first countries to have a grant stopped because of poor implementation, as early as 2004. Looking at how the guidelines of the Global Fund were interpreted in these settings is expected to provide interesting insights into what works and what does not, when it comes to multi-stakeholder engagement.