Oxford Policy Management

KAZAKHSTAN: EXTERNAL EVALUATION, BOTA PROGRAMS

Qualitative Assessment of the Social Services Programme

Report from the first round of the evaluation

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November 2011

Acknowledgements

This assessment is based on qualitative fieldwork and analysis conducted by BISAM Central Asia, Tata Chanturidze, Saltanat Januzakova and Joanna Rogers. Many thanks to all the staff involved in this.

Many thanks also to all the individuals who took time to participate in interviews and provide feedback. Their views make the report what it is.

This report has benefitted from comments from Jo Baskott and Clare O'Brien of Oxford Policy Management. Jo provided detailed peer review comments on the report. Clare has also been instrumental in providing advice and assistance throughout the assessment process, and is managing the overall BOTA external evaluation.

This report has also benefitted from considerable inputs from BOTA's SSP and M&E teams, including extensive comments on the Rapid Assessment of July 2011 collated by Farkhod Saidulloev. Many thanks to all the BOTA staff involved for these helpful comments.

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Abbreviations

CCT   Conditional cash transfer

ECD   early childhood development

KZT   Kazakh Tenge

MIS   management information system

NGO   non-governmental organisation

OPM   Oxford Policy Management

SSP   Social Services Programme

TAP   Tuition assistance programme

1 Assessment context and methodology

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Purpose of qualitative assessment report

The objective of this assessment report is to provide independent qualitative feedback on the processes and impacts of the BOTA social services programme (SSP) in Almaty, Astana and Shymkent cities and surrounding oblasts and in nine other oblasts across the country including: Aktubinskaya, Zhambylskaya, Kyzylordinskaya, West Kazakhstan and East Kazakhstan.

This assessment report is a small part of a much larger impact and operational evaluation of the BOTA Foundation's programmes, including the Tuition Assistance Programme (TAP) and Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (CCT).

1.1.2 Introduction to the BOTA Foundation SSP

The SSP makes grants to Kazakh and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working to improve the lives of children and youth from impoverished families. The NGOs mostly apply to the BOTA Foundation for funding in semi-annual open competitions. Applicants are assessed on their institutional and professional capacity effectively to deliver social services and improve the welfare of children and youth suffering from poverty. The BOTA Foundation has held three complete grant rounds to date for the SSP with the fourth round currently being assessed at the time of writing.

There are five types of grants under the SSP:

1. Community mobilisation and planning (up to 300,000 tenge - $2000)
2. Social services (up to 3,750,000 tenge - $25,000)
3. Scaling up/Replication (up to 7,250,000 tenge - $50,000)
4. NGO capacity building (up to 7,250,000 tenge)
5. System reform (up to 7,250,000 tenge)

There are four target groups/areas of work

1. Early childhood development (ECD) – expanding access to preschool for 4-6 year olds and improving quality of education
2. Youth opportunities and risk prevention – facilitating transition from education to employment; harm reduction/promotion of health youth behaviours
3. Services for children and youth with disabilities – integration, inclusion, community based rehabilitation; expanding existing services to poorer communities
4. Children and youth in difficult life situations – child/youth and family social work, prevention of institutionalisation, creating alternative care options, facilitating deinstitutionalisation, supporting care leavers, children and youth in conflict with the law.

In addition to the main four grant areas, the SSP awards grants to NGOs to provide integration and rehabilitation services to children and young people with disabilities and their families enrolled in the CCT programme which are known as CSI grants (CCT Social Integration).

Table 1.1   Grants awarded, by type – 3 rounds

Area	Awarded	% of total awarded
ECD	21	10%
Youth	76	36%
Youth in difficult life situation	45	21%
Disability	68	32%
CSI	3	1%
Total by Status	**213**	**100%**

Source: adapted from SSP records provided by BOTA/SSP team

1.1.3 Objective of assessment

The objective of this assessment is to review the operational arrangements of the SSP to understand its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency in contributing to achieving the programme's objectives. As with the operational evaluation of the CCT and TAP, the assessment covers the entire process of grant administration, from the start-up of each grant round (targeting, application, selection, enrolment and registration), through to implementation (case management, payments, institutional relations and coordination) to monitoring and evaluation.

The assessment presents findings on whether the processes set up by BOTA are relevant and effective enough to maximise the inclusion in the programme of the target group (NGOs operating in a relevant social sector); and what the major constraints are for those who either apply unsuccessfully or who do not apply at all.

A full list of evaluation questions is presented in Annex A.

The findings are intended to provide recommendations that are directed at helping BOTA to improve current processes and procedures. BOTA already has well-established mechanisms in place to monitor and assess its programme. The study aims therefore both to provide independent corroboration of BOTA's own observations, and also reveal challenges and successes not yet documented by BOTA's internal monitoring and evaluation process.

1.2   Assessment methodology

This assessment draws on interviews conducted with successful, unsuccessful and non-applicant NGOs from Almaty, Astana, Shymkent and nearby oblasts and on phone interviews carried out with NGOs from nine other oblasts. In total, forty NGOs were interviewed – nine unsuccessful applicants, twenty-nine successful applicants and two 'other' (for example non-applicant NGO) see Table 1.2 below for more details. These interviews were conducted face-to-face and by telephone (for more remote NGOs), in both cases using a semi-structured interview guide. The guides covered the key topics set out above (and in the list of evaluation questions) by restructuring the topics around accessible questions. A full list of the key features of the NGOs that were interviewed can be found in Annex B.

NGOs were selected for interview in two stages. First, the database was divided into successful and unsuccessful. Within these divisions, a range of NGO and grant types were then selected to ensure that interviewees represented as full a range of applicants as possible. Non-applicant

NGOs were identified by asking respondents to suggest NGOs that they felt could have applied but did not and it should be noted that only 1 non-applicant NGO was identified.

Table 1.2 sets out the interviews undertaken for this assessment.

Table 1.2   NGOs interviewed

NGOs interviewed by target group	Astana and Akmolinskaya oblast	Almaty and Almatyinskaya oblast	SKO	EKO, WKO	Other oblasts*	Total
1 ECD	2	1		1	2	6
2 Youth opportunities and risk prevention	3	4	3	1	3	14
3 Services for children with disabilities	1	2	1		2	6
4 Children and youth in difficult life situations	3	5	1	1	2	12
Other	1	1				2
Total NGOs interviewed	**10**	**13**	**5**	**3**	**9**	**40**
Of which						
Rejected	2	3	1		3	9
Successful	7	9	4	3	6	29
Other	1	1				2
NGOs interviewed by type of grant						
Social services	5	5	4	2	4	20
Community mobilisation action plans	1	5		1	3	10
NGO capacity building	2	1	1			4
Replication	1	1			1	3
CSI					1	1
Other	1	1				2

*Zhambylskaya, Kyzylordinskaya, Atyrauskaya, Mangystauskaya, Aktubinskaya, Kostanaiskaya, Karaganda,

This sample represents around 9% of all BOTA/SSP applicants and around 26% of SSP grantees who have been awarded grants which is not a representative sample, but is an adequate sample for this qualitative assessment.

1.3   Report structure

The rest of this report presents results of the fieldwork under the following headings which are in keeping with the framework of enquiry agreed in the evaluation plan:

1. Relevance
2. Effectiveness and efficiency
   - Sources of information on BOTA/SSP
   - SSP application process
   - Payment process and reporting
   - BOTA support

3. SSP Impact
4. Sustainability

Throughout the fieldwork results we present relevant recommendations from respondents, and then offer recommendations from the assessors in the concluding section.

Section 3 then offers some conclusions and recommendations for the BOTA SSP.

2 Results from fieldwork

2.1 The relevance of the SSP to NGOs working in social services

The relevance of the SSP was assessed in two ways. First, we reviewed relevance in terms of the sector: the content of the work being funded, and the relevance of the target groups that were prioritised for intervention by SSP compared with the broader spectrum of needs. Second, we looked at the relevance of the two main planks of the BOTA interventions – providing funding for NGOs and training / capacity building for NGO social service providers and communities.

The Social Services Law of 2008 is a key piece of legislation within which the BOTA/SSP fits. This law provides for the delivery of social services to vulnerable groups including children, young people and their families and sets out the legal basis for the state to contract NGOs to provide social services. The legislation has yet to be implemented fully by the government, a situation that can be attributed to a number of factors including: the regulatory framework for delivering services, whether by state, NGO or private service providers, has yet to be finalised; there is a general shortage of both state, NGO and private service providers. The BOTA/SSP is therefore meeting a relevant priority in the Kazakhstan child welfare and broader social sector by aiming to develop and extend the range and reach of social services for a part of the vulnerable groups that are the focus of the Social Services Law while particularly focusing on NGOs as potential service providers. It is supported in this aim by Save the Children, a leading international child welfare NGO, which provides technical support to the BOTA team to help ensure that services being developed are relevant, effective and based on best international practices.

Part of the BOTA overall programme goals is to develop models of working with particularly vulnerable groups that can then be taken forward by other actors such as NGOs, private foundations, government structures, national and international donors once BOTA funding ceases. Within this broad remit to work towards wide-reaching systemic change that can have an impact on large numbers of the BOTA foundation target beneficiaries, the BOTA team sees the SSP as a potential model of transparent, accountable and well-regulated social contracting or social grant-making which could be used by these actors in the medium to long-term. An early achievement of the BOTA/SSP was to make a significant contribution to bringing about changes in legislation that permit national foundations to award grants to individuals and to non-profit organisations without the grants incurring taxes[1]. The BOTA target beneficiary groups and programme areas also reflect the policy and strategy priorities of leading child welfare agencies in Kazakhstan such as UNICEF – early childhood development, children with disabilities, family support for socially vulnerable families, reducing child poverty and increasing opportunities for young people are all central to current child-welfare development agendas, not only in Kazakhstan but in the wider region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States[2].

Feedback from respondents also confirms that BOTA has selected relevant target areas, priorities and types of grant. It also confirms that funding and training provided by BOTA are important and needed.

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[1] See the Law of Republic of Kazakhstan of 16 November 2009 'On introducing changes and additions to sever legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on questions of taxation' which introduced changes to the Tax Code. See also Order of the Government of Kazakhstan of 30 December 2009, No. 2277 which confirmed the BOTA Foundation as the, at that time, only Kazakh NGO permitted to make non-taxable grants to NGOs - source: www.icnl.org/programs/location/nis/resources/Newsletter%201%20(English).pdf

[2] See for example http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/whatwedo.html

BOTA's programme areas are relevant to local social service needs

On the question "Are the SSP areas the most important for your work?" the vast majority of NGOs responded positively, underlying that BOTA has "well-chosen broad priority areas" and that "all key social service areas are well captured." Some NGOs indicated that "there is a deficit of specialists and information in the area of Social Services, and BOTA helps to fill in this gap."

Respondent views on adding priorities to SSP are of two types. The first type includes considerations about specific areas / types of social services. Many of the suggestions that were made fit largely into the broader BOTA priorities which have already been defined, which confirms the relevance of existing programme areas but which also indicates that applicants may not be aware that these activities are already permissible within the SSP. Examples include suicide prevention; support to 18-year-old care leavers who may have no job and no home; parenting support to care leavers who have had their own children at a young age; support to "social orphans' – children who are living with their families but whose needs are being neglected and who are not receiving adequate care and protection; services to support children who are being abused in their families; services that involve the elderly, for example orphans visiting the elderly once a week and spending time with them; and the development of tolerance among youth, such as in large cities where local children were reported by one respondent to create conflict with newcomers in new settlements containing rural workers. Given that several NGOs, mainly existing or former BOTA grantees, were suggesting these as 'new' areas that are not in the BOTA priorities, when the SSP not only permits them, but actively encourages them, it suggests that BOTA may need to regularly check with its grantees it is using the same language as the social services NGOs when describing the kinds of services that it wants to fund under the SSP. This is a normal situation for countries where social services are only starting to emerge and BOTA already consults regularly and actively with its NGO applicants and grantees to clarify the SSP priorities and focus areas and help them to find their place within the broad BOTA SSP priority areas. In the fourth SSP round the priority areas were expressed in more detail and it will be interesting to see how this affects the type and range of applications.

The second type of view on priorities offered by respondents that could further enhance the relevance of the SSP relate more to project cycle management, strengthening links to stakeholders and supporting NGOs in remote areas:

- Extending the time for implementation of large projects (currently a one year implementation cycle is standard for all projects), as outcomes could not be achieved within this period. For example, NGOs working with children with severe disabilities (autism or paralysis) can achieve limited results within one year. Some respondents also suggested lengthening the grant period for social services projects.

The BOTA/SSP introduced a 'renew' facility during the third grant round in March 2011 for NGOs running services which have particularly proved their value in reaching target beneficiaries with effective services. The renewal grant type streamlines the application process for these projects, but they are nevertheless subject to the same rigorous assessment process as all SSP grant types and are not automatic renewals. According to BOTA/SSP team monitoring data, thirteen 'renew' grants were approved in 2011 out of 23 applications for this type of grant, of which 5 were for scaling up into system change or replicating successful service models and 8 were for social services grants.

- Intensifying the support to the organisational / institutional development of NGOs working in the social sector in rural areas.

The BOTA/SSP team has demonstrated steady progress in supporting small community groups, whether in rural or urban areas, to apply for action plan (also known as community mobilisation) grants. These types of small grant are now subject to an 'open door' application approach which

means that applications can be submitted through the year and, so far in 2011, seventeen applications have been received of which 6 were awarded. The BOTA/CCT programme, which is active mainly in rural areas, is also engaged in community mobilisation activity which has the potential to start to generate applicants for SSP grants in the next couple of years as volunteers, parents and other local community members become more active.

- Improving engagement with and awareness of governmental structures, both regional, local and national

BOTA has engaged in raising awareness of governmental structures at regional and local levels particularly where it has active or planned CCT programmes, but has also engaged in information dissemination and networking with regional and local authorities on TAP and SSP issues. At national level, within the constraints imposed by its funding which does not allow BOTA to either fund or work formally with the government, BOTA has been developing constructive relationships with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection concerning all its programme areas, and discussions of options for BOTA to support the provision of technical assistance in preparing the way for social contracting in the delivery of services to children and families is of particular relevance to the SSP.

Lack of funding is an important constraint on NGO activities, though not the only constraint mentioned by respondents

On the issue of whether funding for NGOs is a major constraint (and therefore relevant as a key intervention from BOTA), NGOs gave diverse responses. A number of NGOs indicated that funding is a major constraint, and that many good ideas are not realised because of a lack of funding in social (and other) sectors. Even if funding is available, an issue that was raised particularly by respondents from Astana, Almaty and their surrounding oblasts, was corruption in funding agencies, and limited possibility to get these funds without personal relations with donors. Some express logistical issues as a dimension of lack of funding; '*also lack of available space, problems with transportation (children from rural villages can't come and participate in the project)*'.

Other NGOs indicated that they have some opportunities to get funds for social services, including from public agencies, local government, international agencies, charity organisations, as well as private funding from individual sponsors. A number of NGOs stated that "*the problem is that society does not pay attention to social issues*"; or "*the constraint is the lack of medical/care expertise in these areas, and use of old approaches to manage mental or physical disabilities and conditions.*" It was also mentioned that "*the problem is the lack of experienced specialists in these areas; and the tendency that the best specialists now work in private sector, not with NGOs, as NGOs pay much less.*"

Attitudes of specialists and community members are also mentioned as constraints that need addressing; '*also there is lack of support from local authorities*'; '*another constraint is the state of mind of Kazakhstani people. For example, if a new teacher comes to kindergarten, she starts doing it all according to her own ways and doesn't want to learn new techniques that we offer. That's a pity.*'

On the whole, the interviewees identify a lack of knowledge and skills in the sphere of social services for children, youth and families, disability and early childhood education and lack of NGO capacity as equally important constraints as lack of funding. Moreover, funding opportunities for NGOs in Kazakhstan are available – particularly, in areas where larger numbers of active NGOs exist for example in and around Astana and Almaty. The fact that BOTA has supported capacity building for NGOs and offers training opportunities as an intrinsic part of its programme suggests that its interventions – funding and knowledge/capacity building – are responding in a relevant way to the constraints identified by NGOs as they develop and deliver services to children and families.

To what extent BOTA, and Save the Children as its technical advisor, has so far been successful in supporting NGOs to be innovative and develop new ways of addressing the social problems of the target beneficiaries is less clear.

2.2   Effectiveness and efficiency

This section examines together the effectiveness (the extent to which the programme reaches its objectives) and efficiency (the relation between inputs and outputs) of BOTA's SSP processes. It addresses SSP processes in the order that NGOs negotiate them: starting with application, through payment and reporting. For each section, it then provides suggestions for improvements.

Sources of information on BOTA / SSP

The participants named the following sources of information about the BOTA Foundation and SSP:

- Partner NGOs and NGO umbrella organisations or networks
- BOTA website; e-mails from BOTA to NGO network; and BOTA workshops in their regions;
- Television and newspapers
- International donors and organisations – UNICEF, World Bank, Mott Foundation were all mentioned

The non-applicant NGO indicated that they had not applied as they had not heard of BOTA, though they are active in the social sector, and have several projects funded through public funds. Although this is not a full review of coverage, the range of NGOs interviewed clearly indicate that BOTA has successfully reached a wide range of relevant NGOs across the country with information about the SSP:

> 'There are no longer any NGOs in Kazakhstan that aren't informed about the BOTA Foundation. Everyone applies, everyone finds their niche' (East Kazakhstan NGO, successful grantee 3rd round)

> 'There isn't an NGO that is working with children that hasn't heard of BOTA' (East Kazakhstan NGO, successful grantee 3rd round)

> 'everyone has heard of the SSP' (Mangystauskaya NGO, successful grantee 2nd round)

> In our region all NGOs now have information, many are working with them…the level of information is high' (West Kazakhstan NGO, 2nd and 3rd rounds)

'The fact that a fairly major NGO (if judged by size and length of experience) had not heard of the BOTA programme at the time of 3rd round in 2011, and therefore not applied, is surprising but appears fairly clearly to be an exception rather than the rule. The non-applicant NGO interviewed for this evaluation, for example, indicated that the BOTA priorities should also cover 'young families'. In fact three of the four priority areas could target families with young children – ECD, disability and difficult life situations. The NGO in question, however, proposed 'young families' as an additional possible priority thereby indicating that it does not see this topic within the existing BOTA themes – a conclusion that may reflect its own understanding, or that it wasn't actually seeking funding at the time when it did find out about BOTA, rather than a failure on BOTA's part to provide clear information to relevant NGOs.

A few NGOs interviewed indicated that they had been involved in the consultations to establish the programme directions and therefore knew about the grant programme well before the first round was announced.

Recommendations

Many NGOs suggested that the level of information for NGOs is sufficient, but some offered suggestions on improving information to the public as well as NGOs about BOTA including the following ideas:

• Seminars and information meetings at the local level were considered particularly effective by several interviewees.

• Many respondents suggested regional television channels and banners across the roads in regional cities as the best means for communicating with the public. The BOTA SSP team has assessed banners as expensive and not sufficiently targeted to the NGOs they want to reach, but has used regional TV channels during the fourth SSP round free of charge.

• One respondent commented that BOTA is not known to the government in her oblast, for example the Ministry of Education. BOTA is, in fact, engaging with ministry personnel at national and regional levels by disseminating information about SSP requests for proposals through oblast and city internal policy departments, inviting them to conferences, meetings and advisory positions.

SSP application process

NGO perceptions of the SSP application process were divided into two groups. Most respondents (around half of those interviewed) mentioned that the application process was "*very difficult, requiring putting lots of unnecessary details, and to repeat the same information several times*"; "*The application form is complex, too long*" and "*it is not easy and quite time consuming to collect all the legal documents which need to be provided to BOTA.*"

On the other hand, many NGOs (around half of those interviewed) mentioned that filling in BOTA applications was "*very good experience*". "*Though BOTA is extremely detailed in its requirements for the application, it forces NGOs to pay attention to important aspects of the work; it teaches them how to write a good proposal, which then helps with the implementation*".

This difference in perceptions can be best explained as a difference between the capacity and experience of the NGOs in question. Those that have previously applied to donor programmes are more familiar with the kinds of demands being made by BOTA, and those with less experience find these demands complex, confusing, repetitious and overly rigorous.

Application form and timing

Some of the NGOs complained about the complexity of the application format, but admitted that "*it was difficult because of the lack of our own experience in preparing applications*", and it ended up being a "*good learning exercise*". Roughly an equal number of NGOs mentioned that the application form was not difficult. *"it is the most clear and well-explained forms. All the NGOs say that. I'm actually going to use the form to apply for other grants"*

The application process seems to have built capacity in several cases. For instance, some NGOs indicated that, "*if one passes the BOTA application process, it is easy to apply and win other grants.*" One NGO admitted that, "*after starting implementation of the BOTA project, we think all the complexities were derived from our own weakness, and there is no need for BOTA to change anything in application requirements*". As a rule, the NGOs who took part in the 3rd and 4th SSP competitions tend to have more positive comments to offer about the application form and process

as a whole *"I prefer the application process of the 4th round that we applied for, it became easier"* which is a testimony to BOTA's ability to listen to its stakeholders and make appropriate changes.

All respondents indicated that the length of time given by BOTA for the application before the deadline was appropriate.

NGO experience regarding the length of the application process varied. Some NGOs indicated that it "*took three months to fill in the application and collect all necessary legal documents*", others said "*they suffered for few months*", or "*it took about two months*". Only a few NGOs said that "it took about a month," and three NGOs reported completing the application within two weeks. The SSP application procedure allows 30 days from announcement of the call for proposals and the deadline, but NGOs who have heard about the programme evidently spend longer preparing proposals ahead of the announcement of each round.

The costs relating to the application process were mailing expenses and the cost of copying various official documents, which did not exceed 3,000-4,000 Tenge ($20). One NGO indicated that they decided to hand deliver the application, which generated 40,000 Tenge ($200) travel costs, but it was their own decision, not a requirement from BOTA.

From the second round of application, BOTA has reduced the documents required, and requires only the copy of the certificate of registry. From the second round, BOTA also covers bank charges relating to opening a new bank account.

The decision about the area of application / programme was made by most of the NGOs according to their own competence and area of operation. Some were supported by BOTA in taking decisions about what to apply for '*they made suggestions'*. Others stated that they were impressed by the areas identified by BOTA, appreciating their importance and possible impact on the lives of children, youth and families.

A majority of NGOs mention the importance of seminars about the application process to helping them to understand the programme, correctly fill in the application format and meet all the application requirements. Similarly, many NGOs mention a lack of understanding about the requirements for indicators in the application format, but this seems to have been mainly related to earlier funding rounds and in many cases respondents who mention this issue also mention that it was resolved by addressing enquiries to BOTA/SSP staff who were helpful in answering questions.

Support from BOTA during the application process

Most NGOs underlined the support that they received from BOTA SSP team during the application process. They reported having regular contact, discussions and exchange of ideas with BOTA staff; and receiving guidance, timely feedback and comments, and helpful advice. Overall, BOTA was happy to consider well-articulated innovations and accepted changes if they were based on sound justifications. The SSP team provided guidance to some NGOs for selecting the area of the work and key objectives for the project, with correct formulations and styling.

BOTA appears to have made a considerable effort to provide project cycle management training for its applicants and grantees. This investment is valued by respondents as they recognise there is a 'pay-off' in the longer term for their prospects in planning, implementation and securing funding for projects. Most NGOs found the training conducted by BOTA useful.

The vast majority of the NGOs underlined the usefulness of the considerable level of support they got from BOTA staff during the application process "*BOTA is greatly helping in the application process.*"

> BOTA sent us the application form back, we changed quite a few things. I think this part is great, as most other sponsors just tell you that your project doesn't meet our standards and give no explanations, whereas BOTA are always happy to help (Successful applicant, 2nd round)

The SSP team clarifies that it might send the project work plan and budget to organisations for clarification or improvement if the project has been recommended by the Selection Committee for a grant award, but does not return whole applications for improvement. Any requested improvements are based on questions or recommendations brought up by the Selection Committee members during discussions. The respondents value this interaction as it helps them to develop stronger projects and improve planning skills.

Feedback

Some of the NGOs interviewed who were not successful indicated that if the proposal was rejected, BOTA offered explanations for the rejection in a letter signed by the director. One NGO was surprised to see this good practice, as most donor agencies functioning in Kazakhstan never do this.

However, several unsuccessful NGOs interviewed indicated that even after explanations from BOTA, the reason of rejection was not clear to them. One NGO said that the declared reason was "*inadequacy of the budget with the proposal*", on which they "*did not agree and did not find clear, but never argued with BOTA*". A couple of others commented that no explanations were offered '*nobody explained anything*'. Many of those who expressed dissatisfaction with feedback on unsuccessful applications had not approached the BOTA/SSP team for clarifications during the application process.

Some other NGOs also indicated that they never sent complaints to BOTA, as they knew that they were rejected due to their own lack of capacity. Other NGOs mentioned that when they have complained, some of the criticism was understood and accepted by BOTA, and some rejected based on arguments. On the whole, feedback is being provided by the BOTA team and applicants value the opportunity to communicate with the team for clarifications during the application process. One successful applicant commented '*we got our final decision late. We had submitted the application in June and wanted to start the project in September, but got the final answer only on the 1st of December*'. This was probably within the timeframe of the BOTA application process, and the applicant had not fully understood the timetable at the time of application.

Reapplications

Most of the NGOs declared that they will reapply to BOTA/SSP grants. Some of them already re-applied to the 3rd and/or 4th rounds, and mainly to bigger grants or for renewal grants.

Instances of longer-lasting negative impressions of the application process are infrequent.

Challenges

Key challenges revealed in the application process identified by applicants include the following:

- "*The application was too complex, and was aggregated with very strict requirements from BOTA for putting lots of details.*" Several NGOs suggested that the way the phrasing was hard to understand and one Raion-level NGO from Almaty Oblast suggested '*…doing a more exact translation of the English into Russian phrasing in the application, adapting it for us*'.
- "*It required a lot of discussion with BOTA staff to achieve appropriate language and style*";

A few NGOs indicated that "*even after they've completed the proposal, some aspects which were added into it due to BOTA's advice/request, were not clear to the NGO members*". Some of these NGOs said later that, "*all became clear during the implementation and it worked well*". BOTA is explicit in its grant materials that it reserves the right to request changes and adjustments to the project design prior to final approval of the grant and signing of the grant agreement. However, this remains a concern of some NGOs as it is seen as overly interfering.

BOTA appears to have adjusted the requirements and processes for each round to reflect learning from internal monitoring after each round, for example a 'Grantees satisfaction survey' was conducted in January/February 2011 by the BOTA Monitoring and Evaluation department which found that about half of respondents found the application format 'long and complicated' and in need of simplification[3]. This study confirms this finding – about half of respondents find the application format and process complex but necessary and the other half found it too complex and in need of simplification. Feedback from respondents to this survey who had taken part in round 4 as well as earlier rounds, such as the respondent cited above, indicates that the process has been simplified as they find the process more satisfactory.

Recommendations

Suggestions from respondents, both unsuccessful and successful, related to improving the application process could be summarised as follows:

- "*BOTA to make application/proposal format shorter and clearer, and avoid repeating the same things;*"
- "*BOTA to become more flexible in the requirements of technical proposal format.*"
- The suggestion was for "*BOTA to conduct routine training for potential applicant NGOs on the requirements of application and proposal writing before each SSP round.*" Those NGOs who attended BOTA training on proposal preparation were happy with the knowledge and skills they've developed and requested to extend this support.
- Provide greater support to NGOs from Oblasts/remote villages;
- Others asked for "*achieving more flexibility in budgeting. It was said that nowadays BOTA does not allow planning for more then 50% of salaries for the project management, and planning more then 30% of budget costs for equipment/space rent. Most of the NGOs find hardest to get funds for the rent. It is also difficult to find the required qualified professionals on the limited salaries BOTA allows us to pay.*" It is difficult to assess the relevance of this recommendation in relation to salaries, since BOTA has already twice revised the salary scale, based on the NGO employment market in Kazakhstan.The SSP team confirms that there is flexibility in budgeting as the budget, and proportions for salaries for example, depend on the goals, objectives and activities of the project and not on fixed ratios. However, the responses to interviews undertaken for this assessment suggest that there still may be a challenge in communicating this to grantees and applicants especially if the rules have changed from round to round.

The BOTA SSP team has largely taken action on many of these suggestions – it continues to conduct training for potential applicants ahead of each round, has made adjustments to the application requirements in rounds 3 and 4, has introduced open door application procedures to help NGOs applying for smaller action planning grants. On the whole it still might be worthwhile for the BOTA team to convene a focus group of grantees and/or unsuccessful applicants to review the Russian and Kazakh versions of the application materials and website in order to ensure that all applicants are clear about BOTA requirements at the application stage and about the reasons why

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[3] Grantees Satisfaction Survey, January-February 2011, BOTA Monitoring and Evaluation Department

these requirements are in place. This does not necessarily mean changing the structure or content of the application, contracting and reporting process which is already in place – they are largely in keeping with international best practice and represent a reasonable balance between flexibility and caution in managing quite high risk grants to what appear to be some relatively untested organisations with quite limited grant experience. It could mean changing some of the wording and adding some footnotes to the application formats that help to clarify some of the concepts underpinning the formats which are probably fairly alien to the way that most NGOs in Kazakhstan operate, even some of the more experienced NGOs which have had extensive previous donor funding.

Overall, however, the respondents give a picture of a donor which has been effective in targeting its potential grantees and ensuring a fair, transparent and rigorous application and decision-making process. BOTA is viewed as a reasonable donor, willing to accept changes and challenges if they are properly evidenced at all stages of the grant process.

SSP payment process

Most NGOs indicated that the payments by BOTA were made in a timely way, without any delay. BOTA checks all financial documents extremely carefully, and makes payments immediately after the financial documents are accepted. No recommendations were made related to the payment process.

The NGO who stated that there were problems with payments reported difficulties with obtaining payment for specific items, particularly "*for non-residents; and for business trips*." They also found it difficult to comply with BOTA's requirements that NGOs pay for services only through bank transfers, especially in rural areas, where this service is not always available. These complaints relate mainly to the BOTA financial reporting requirements which limited cash spending to 15,000 tenge ($100) per month in earlier grant rounds and place certain conditions and reporting requirements on business trips within the project. BOTA has since increased the cash limit to 30,000 tenge per month.

A couple of NGOs expressed a wish to obtain a first tranche of 50-70% of the grant amount to be able to purchase the required equipment and materials for the project implementation. In addition, some NGOs mentioned cases of delay in financing of a project (payment of the first tranche) that puts the project implementation at threat in cases when major factor of the project implementation is seasonality. Large up front tranches naturally present a risk that BOTA would wish to manage and the SSP team has started to develop a risk management mechanism for assessing the scope of flexibility that can be introduced into the tranche amounts. It should also be noted that from the third round, BOTA is providing 100% funding to Action Plan Development grantees.

Budget changes

On the question whether the NGOs ever wanted to make changes to their budget, and whether it is possible with BOTA, almost all NGOs indicated that they wanted to make changes to the agreed budget, but it was difficult to achieve with BOTA. Some NGOs said that, "*BOTA is more flexible in case of small changes, which are within 10% of the total budget, but even these changes require lots of discussions and negotiations with BOTA*". Others indicated that, "*BOTA is not allowing the change in spending, even if it is necessary.*" The BOTA requirements are stringent for the size of grants that it is disbursing, but probably reasonable given the lack of experience and low levels of annual turnover of many of its grantees. BOTA disburses large numbers of quite small grants – the largest annual grant is $50,000, an amount that is small compared to the amounts being granted to NGOs by bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors in Kazakhstan. The EU, for example, is awarding grants averaging 100,000 EURO per year for 2-3 year projects under its human rights

and democracy scheme and UNDP has a small grants programme for environmental projects, which is awarding up to $25,000.

Several NGOs stated that, "*they achieved changes in an established budget frame, after thorough discussions with BOTA, and provision of well-argued justifications, but it was a long and complex process.*"

Several NGOs argued that if project staff make savings from the budget, they should be allowed to spend this money on other activities (within relevant areas), and BOTA should not take away the saved amount, as happens currently.

Most of the NGOs desire more flexibility in re-allocating sums between the budget lines, or dropping procurement of some items that were listed in an original budget (if, for instance, they have received another grant from another donor, and do not want to duplicate the procurement). Other requirements to the budget modifications related to modifying the share of the grant amount spent on equipment/furniture, and on the bank charges. One NGO suggests that the NGO applicant should be able to propose the timing of the tranches of funding at the application stage in keeping with the project plan. This idea is echoed by one or two other successful applicants, and also the idea of permitting adjustments for inflation in the project budgets. Another constraint mentioned frequently by grantees, particularly in rural areas, are the requirements for documenting payment for transport and travel in rural areas, which are not always possible to meet.

However, as indicated above, in one or two cases NGOs state they "*were not allowed to make changes*", or "*it required extremely detailed justification, explanations to different people from SSP team, which took a lot of time and involved several meetings.*" The requirement for prior approval from a donor for changes to budget is not unreasonable and it is common for NGOs to resent this requirement. However, it is also common practice for donors to accept that the reality of implementing a project sometimes differs from the plans so an element of flexibility is required. BOTA has already relaxed the levels of funding changes for services and product purchases that require prior approval from 75,000 tenge ($515) to 150,000 tenge ($1,030) from the second round. The BOTA approach of tight financial controls and requirements is required not only as part of the terms of its funding, but it also helps to fulfil its role in building NGO capacity and understanding of donor/grantee relationships. Too many unplanned changes can be a sign of a project that is not being effectively managed.

Financial reporting

On the questions "How do you account to BOTA for funding? Any problems? What works well?" the majority of NGOs responded that, "*BOTA has very strict rules for financial and narrative reporting'*. Other statements were that "*BOTA has an established format for financial reporting, on a quarterly basis*"; "*the accounting format is very complex, even for very experienced accountants who work with the NGOs.*" A quick review of the BOTA requirements for financial reporting indicates that they are in keeping with many types of donor requirements and are not excessive. Again, these comments from respondents could be more of an indication of their lack of knowledge and experience than of BOTA being excessively rigorous. On the other hand, it could be that BOTA has not sufficiently explained the reasoning behind its requirements, or that it has not communicated clearly enough what the requirements are. BOTA has already revised reporting requirements and simplified the forms on the website. The BOTA/SSP team does not plan to publish salary limits on the website, or rules about how salary levels are determined, as this will then motivate NGOs to apply to the upper limits of the published scales or rules. Some guidance for NGOs, however, about the BOTA rules on salaries, could help applicants and grantees to better understand where they stand on this issue.

The process of approving the financial report is also seen as quite cumbersome by many respondents, "*financial reports go back and forth between the NGO and BOTA, before they get approved*." Similar complaints were expressed by other NGOs, saying that *"BOTA requests to account for every single step made by the project team, requiring frequent calls and meetings with SSP team. The supervision from SSP side is worse than direct project management*." This view of BOTA as overly controlling and mistrusting could be an indication of the lack of experience of the NGO in question, or it could be an indication of a lack of communication skills on the part of BOTA staff. It is likely to be a combination of both. The NGOs that have understood the need for rigorous reporting, the importance of transparency and the advantages of a healthy and constructive exchange between donor and grantee are more likely to be those that have previous experience. Generally, respondents value interaction with BOTA staff, but BOTA staff could be better at communicating the need for the BOTA reporting requirements to less experienced NGOs. The BOTA internal monitoring report from January-February 2011 mentioned above, examined the question of communications between grantees and BOTA staff. The report concluded that grantees are almost overwhelmingly satisfied or very satisfied with BOTA staff support across all aspects of support including reporting. Grantees who responded to the BOTA internal survey were marginally less satisfied with the financial reporting system itself with only around 10% dissatisfied and 90% satisfied or absolutely satisfied. The BOTA SSP team took part in communications training in the summer and autumn of 2011 that may help to address some of these issues.

Other comments in relation with the financial reporting requirements from BOTA were the following: "*These requirements are sometimes not rational or justified, and definitely over-detailed*." The example given in this case was that BOTA requested the return of 20 tenge ($0.13) after the project was closed, and the transaction cost was more than this amount. BOTA has now changed the rule so that grantees need not return unused funds up to 1,450 tenge ($10), but this still seems somewhat low. In addition, BOTA has established a certain percentage for the bank charges, which is not enough, and is not flexible if the reality requires changes according to some grantees.

Narrative reporting

BOTA explains the need to have lists of beneficiaries as part of narrative reporting in letters, seminars, site visits and direct communication with grantees and, with few exceptions, the NGOs are willing and able to meet these requirements. Some NGOs still stated, however that, "*BOTA was unnecessarily strict in requirements towards narrative reporting*" and require large amounts of documentation.

Recommendations

Recommendations from respondents for improving payment processes included the following:

- SSP should simplify financial reporting requirements, as they are currently very difficult and detailed.
- BOTA should take a "*differentiated approach*" to NGOs, namely, it should keep "*micro-managing*" weak NGOs, and give more flexibility to NGO which are well established and have a good image.

On the whole, BOTA seems to have in place an application, reporting and monitoring system that is fit for purpose. It is rigorous and careful while permitting reasonable levels of flexibility and minimising risks of fraud or misuse of funds. It is also designed to help smaller, weaker NGOs 'learn the ropes' and become equipped to handle larger and larger amounts of funding. As discussed in this section and in section 3.2 below, the support and input provided by the SSP team is perceived by some respondents to represent mistrust – by others it is recognised as helpful and constructive criticism which enables the NGO to grow and develop. On balance, it appears to

represent a constructive and valuable investment into building the capacity of a largely embryonic NGO sector in Kazakhstan.

Support from BOTA

Similarly to their observations about reporting requirements, NGOs have largely positive views about the support they receive from BOTA, but also some reservations. Most of the NGOs indicated that they were getting "*fantastic support from BOTA at all stages of the project, starting from the application process, and including implementation, monitoring and evaluation; communication with other NGOs, and information provision on other donors*". A few felt that BOTA staff were overly mistrustful and high-handed in their attitude and the way they express themselves with grantees – "*they don't always understand the specifics of our work, they behave in a high-handed way towards the NGO, like an older brother.*" One NGO expressed their mixed views as follows: '*Lack of trust in financial matters. In other contacts...it is only a pleasure, we receive answers and support quickly. [They are] professionals who command respect and thanks.*' On the whole, the words of another NGO grantee sum up the experience of many grantees:

> They are always ready to give a tip about how to do things, they explain, and are always ready to listen and help, including the finance people. On the whole it is a relationship of partners.

BOTA support takes the form of training on proposal writing, frequent consultations and meetings, routine phone calls and e-mail exchange, and advice. Most of the NGOs regard BOTA support as "*very kind and correct support, and interesting interaction*".

Some NGOs indicated that BOTA is even involved in finding the beneficiaries, in deciding whom to hire, what are the criteria for selection of staff. This intensive support was regarded as helpful by some NGOs and as excessive micro-management by others. The review of CVs by SSP staff is intended by BOTA to ensure that properly qualified professionals are hired into key positions, for example accountants, medical specialists etc and is designed to minimise risks in the future implementation of the grant.

It was suggested by some that BOTA should consider simplifying operational and supervision requirements, introducing more flexibility and trust to partner NGOs. On the whole, however, the recommendations from respondents reflect a need to communicate the reasons for the BOTA requirements (CV review for example) to applicants and grantees, rather than to necessarily simplify or change the requirements or procedures themselves.

Communication with BOTA

Almost all NGOs responded that they communicate very frequently with BOTA, through phone, e-mails, routine reporting, BOTA monitoring visits, and BOTA workshops.

NGOs were impressed by the top management of BOTA, visiting their organizations, enquiring about the project progress and difficulties the project teams face.

One or two NGOs, however, mentioned that BOTA "*does not understand their language*" and that there is a need for a glossary in the application format. It is clear from reviewing the application documentation on the BOTA website that the Russian (and Kazakh) versions have been adapted from an English language original which draws heavily on contemporary project cycle management concepts and which is perfectly in keeping with best practices in the donor community internationally. On the whole the adaptation seems adequate, but the feedback from some respondents tends to indicate that BOTA may want to consider working with a focus group of

grantees to further refine the Russian and Kazakh versions in order to address the conceptual difficulties that applicants are encountering in the translated documents.

It was clear from responses, that BOTA's monitoring and evaluation reporting requirements are familiar to grantees and include quarterly narrative and financial reports; monitoring visits, including visits by SSP staff; frequent phone discussions, meetings with BOTA project staff, registration list of beneficiaries with contact information, registration list of services rendered, project materials, training programmes, list of training participants; registration of attendance; daily registration of the project staff coming and leaving the office/working hours; and number of other forms.

NGOs noted that beneficiaries are involved in the monitoring process when members of the BOTA team visit the NGOs, observe how the work is progressing, and speak with beneficiaries. Examples were SSP team discussions with teachers, disabled children and youth. BOTA also contacts beneficiaries as part of financial monitoring.

2.3 SSP impact

Impact refers to the positive and negative changes as a result of the programme. This section provides an overview of what funds were used for, and explores what the funding added – what the NGOs were able to do with funds that they had not managed to do without them.

Defining beneficiaries and monitoring indicators

The BOTA SSP team confirms that the target beneficiaries of the SSP are the children and young people with whom the NGOs that it is funding are working. A central part of the monitoring that BOTA has been carrying out in relation to the SSP so far has focused on counting the numbers of beneficiaries reported by NGO grantees. This provides some indication of the volume of services being delivered and the scale of the programme's reach – currently numbering at around 17,000 beneficiaries. This type of monitoring, however, provides only limited information about the impact of the programme and the range of experiences of the beneficiaries. A child who has had the quality of his or her pre-school education transformed by an NGO training programme for teachers, for example, has experienced much greater impact than a child who has taken part in a summer activity that may have a more limited and less far reaching impact both on that child and on other children. The BOTA team has recognised the limitation of this type of quantitative indicator and is now seeking to introduce impact indicators that focus on the change being achieved for children and young people by the NGO inputs. It will be important that the indicators are carefully chosen for the information that they can provide to the BOTA team and realistic to collect for the NGO grantees. The NGOs themselves are also beneficiaries of the BOTA SSP and the growth in their capacity, skills, abilities and changes to their ways of working are valid and important indicators of the SSP impact – as valid as the impact on beneficiaries – which BOTA may want to measure.

Use of funds

What are funds used for? The responses to this question are of two types, depending on the type of grant received by NGOs. NGOs implementing the Capacity building or Replication grants responded that the funds were used for two purposes. First, the primary area of the project – services to the target groups, i.e. treatment and care of children with disabilities, the procurement of teaching materials, the development of particular treatment/care procedures, and the development of an applied psychological model / an algorithm to be used for families in difficult situations. The second objective is building capacity of other professionals and/or NGOs in given areas, as well as in proposal writing, application and bidding. For instance, one of the NGOs was training psychologists from partner NGOs who worked with children and youth in difficult family / school circumstances, and was also providing services to the children and youth directly.

NGOs implementing community mobilization or social services grants mainly have one objective to serve direct beneficiaries, as children and youth. Examples include "*education of children up to 7 years*", "*establishing a Yard Club, and teaching youth on art, craft, and engineering*", "*prevention of HIV infection among groups of young people at risk*", "*summer camps for orphans and children from at risk families*", "*we set up a mini-centre for young children in a deprived village*" "*preventing children from entering care*" "*helping adopters and foster carers to find out about the rules for adoption and foster care*".

Additionality

What can you do now that you couldn't have without SSP? Almost all NGOs underlined that SSP offered opportunities for them to do more of their existing work or reach children and young people with whom they otherwise wouldn't have been able to work. This is probably because the BOTA programme has four priority areas that are both broad and targeted, and within those make NGOs focus on reaching the poorest families in their areas. BOTA has also invested in building the knowledge and capacity of the applicants and grantees in order to expand their reach and range of services – there are probably few donors which are behaving so strategically within broad enough priority areas to allow NGOs some flexibility and creativity of approach.   Characteristics of BOTA support mentioned by respondents include the following:

- BOTA support gives equal opportunities to children from poor families to get additional education, skills and services similar to those children and youth from affluent families. BOTA creates a potential to reveal particularly skilful children from the poorest fractions of society, and support development of their capabilities for those, who would otherwise never get these services. For example, in one project "*BOTA helped to define what "poor family" means, and then select children from the poor families to be project beneficiaries." "On one occasion BOTA allowed us to accept a child from a very poor family who was 1.5 years old (this is not the age for the target group, as the programme accepts 4-6 year olds), just because the family was extremely poor*."
- BOTA support gave opportunities to children with disabilities to get social services and education, which would not happen without the SSP;
- BOTA support enables Oralmans (minority groups) to learn about their rights, opportunities and supports their empowerment;
- BOTA encourages exchange of best practice between professionals from different Oblasts of Kazakhstan, as well as from other countries (Russian, Eastern Europe, countries with developed market economies). It enables engagement of specialists, from whom it is a pleasure to learn new approaches and methodologies. For example, one NGO stated that "*we are engaging Spanish and Bulgarian trainers through this project, and BOTA has no objection to this. Other donors, including the government, would not allow this to happen*".
- BOTA facilitates interaction and joint work of NGOs from various oblasts of Kazakhstan. As indicated by one of the NGOs that received a capacity building grant, "*BOTA support allows us to capture several NGOs simultaneously*". "*This project was extremely important, as it created the possibility for us to interact with professionals from other Oblasts and share experience.*"

All NGOs reported that they would continue the activities started with BOTA funding. Most of them mentioned that they would re-apply for BOTA funding, and also apply to other donors. Some of the NGOs indicated that they were getting private payments for similar activities from individuals / families, and they would continue to practice privately. However, then services would only be available for children / young people from affluent families, and poor children / young people would suffer, as they might be excluded from having opportunities to receive the services without BOTA support.

Some NGOs reported that they did not include "*satisfaction*" indicators in the project proposal. However, all of them expressed satisfaction from the work done, as they felt it was "*unique help*" and had the "*largest positive impact*" on children, youth and families.

In addition, NGOs are getting messages on high satisfaction from children, youth and their parents. One of the NGOs mentioned that "*the change SSP makes for people is evident. Beneficiaries and their families are becoming alive, with increased hope in their future, and believe in own capabilities to change their fortune*". Another NGO mentioned "*children started to realise own mistakes and drawbacks; they are showing signs of improvement and striving for perfection*". Another NGO indicated that "*12 out of 25 NGOs trained by them have received grants from BOTA / other donors, so the sense of satisfaction of own input in this success was great*", yet another that "we developed inclusive education in our region, now three schools accept children with disabilities".

NGOs indicated that other benefits of SSP to children and youth include:

- Introduction of new methodologies for treatment and education of youth and children;
- Replication of experience of working with "difficult" children / youth in ordinary situations, searching for more delicate and professional approaches in everyday practice with regular children and teenagers.
- New arrangements and practices institutionalised in schools and kindergartens, including mediation and conflict resolution practice, and psychiatric services to difficult children.
- Increasing belief in their capabilities and in the ability to create own future;
- Increased knowledge about proper behaviour and desire to improve own drawbacks and weaknesses;

Some of the NGOs indicate that they either have co-funding for their activities, have been able to attract volunteers or gifts in kind, or they have other projects funded by other donors or private sources. Others stated they did not have co-funding or other sources of funding.

Nearly all successful NGOs indicated that the SSP is worth the time and effort involved in applying and managing the grant. NGOs intend to expand the programmes in the next round, and also approach other sources to fund similar activities.

Most of the respondents mentioned that in addition to the financial assistance, they benefited from "*an interaction with other organisations working in the same area*," the "*procurement of unique education and treatment materials for disabled children, which are then used in other projects as well as routine work*;" and the "*accumulation of knowledge and experience from international and local colleagues, which helps with other activities/projects*".

None of the interviewed NGOs stated that the SSP made them change their priorities. All of them stated that "They are working in the area of their expertise", that "the NGO and SSP priorities are mutual," and that the "SSP priorities are very broad, so it is easy to accommodate". There are some examples among respondents of NGOs, which weren't child or youth focused before their application to BOTA, adding young people or children to their beneficiary target groups. For example, a rural micro-credit organisation that has used its BOTA grant to train its outreach team to target unemployed young people in rural areas. As a result, they now provide micro-credit services to this target group and will continue to do so beyond the lifetime of the BOTA funding.

Within each SSP project, the grants appear to be having a positive impact on the BOTA target groups. Each organisation that has received a grant also reports positive impact on its capacity to develop more services for BOTA target groups. SSP also seems to be achieving strong results in

terms of building community and NGO capacity to extend and deepen the social services on offer to the target groups. BOTA has already taken action to strengthen impact by narrowing some of its future calls to focus on specific goals. The fourth round, for example, limited the number of grants for youth as this category of beneficiary has been over-represented in previous grant rounds so greater emphasis will be placed on the other beneficiary target groups in order to address this imbalance.

The SSP seems to have reached most of the existing child welfare sector NGOs in the country and most of the NGOs that have a complementary programme focus that they can extend to the intended BOTA beneficiary groups. This is a sign of how small this community of NGOs is and a sign of how successful the SSP outreach and information dissemination has been. Given that the SSP appears to have so comprehensively reached most established NGOs that have, or can have, a focus on the BOTA target beneficiary groups, the question arises as to how the future SSP rounds can continue to extend the reach of services. The renewal grants introduced this year and the open door approach to the community mobilisation/action planning small grants appear to be sound strategies for addressing this challenge. Extending the provision of technical assistance to NGOs could also support them to attempt greater innovations in addressing the social problems of the target beneficiaries – so for example, where a NGO might currently be focused mainly on delivering summer camp activities which are nice to have, but not essential in addressing social problems, BOTA SSP can encourage the NGO to develop new skills and knowledge in social work, youth work, disability in order to try and develop services that can have a more wide-reaching impact on the social problems. This programme of technical assistance has begun, but has not yet reached significant numbers of NGOs across all four programme areas.

2.4   Sustainability of activities funded by the programme

Sustainability refers to the benefits of the programme enduring after donor funding is withdrawn.

NGOs reported that sustainability is achieved through:

- Building capacity of counterpart NGOs and professionals;
- Offering similar services to families who can pay themselves;
- Applying to other donors, especially the government – regional and local - and charity organisations for similar projects;
- Developing successful models and presenting them to local authorities, to make them interested in funding them;
- Some NGOs see the incorporation of young people into their target group – for example for micro-credit services – as the main basis for sustainability of the BOTA funding inputs

All NGOs stated that the funding was sufficient for the project. Some of the NGOs expressed a desire to have permission from BOTA to pay larger salaries for specialists involved in the project, and paying 100% salaries for the administrative staff. Others wanted to have permission to buy premises, or paying more for the rent that would allow extension of the project activities.

Most of the NGOs reported that they would re-apply to SSP next round, but would also seek other funding from the European Commission, governmental structures, and private and other donors. A few NGOs stated that they would continue work on the same issues, but without BOTA support.

On the whole, while some respondents had a clear vision of the sustainability of their project, the strategies for securing further funding outlined by the respondents appeared vague or weak in many cases. It is still too early in the implementation of the SSP to be able to give a conclusive assessment of its success in supporting initiatives that go on to become institutionally and

financially sustainable or to become sustainable in other ways, for example by introducing particular methods of working with children and families that become replicated by others.

2.5   Other comments from the interviewed NGOs

At the end of the interviews, most NGOs expressed willingness to underline once again, that BOTA is one of the exceptional donors in Kazakhstan, who is not corrupt and creates fair, transparent opportunities for NGOs to work in the area of social services. One of the NGOs said that "*BOTA is the only fund which helps grant recipients and applicants to grow professionally in Kazakhstan.*" Others said that "*professional practice and attitude are key characteristics of BOTA.*"

NGOs were also very willing to reiterate the most important messages to be communicated with BOTA, which are summarised below:

Comments on BOTA image and operation:

- *"BOTA is the only fund I know that helps grant recipients and applicants in Kazakhstan."*
- *"Professionalism and a humane attitude are key characteristics of BOTA. BOTA is one of the exceptional donors in Kazakhstan who is not corrupt. BOTA helps you to grow professionally."*
- *"BOTA is one of the best donors in terms of transparency, but worse in terms of being so mistrustful towards organizations implementing grants".*

Comments on desired support from BOTA:

- BOTA could organise training on proposal writing more often, for both successful and unsuccessful NGOs;
- BOTA could stimulate NGOs to openly discuss complexities of application and reporting during the annual SSP workshops.

3   Conclusions and recommendations

This section sets out conclusions emerging from the fieldwork results.

3.1   Summary conclusions

Conclusions following this initial round of interviews with NGOs can be summarised as follows:

Relevance and Impact

The BOTA priorities are broad enough to ensure that NGOs can develop and implement projects within the scope of their own mission and strategic objectives. The BOTA programme priorities were developed following consultation with experienced NGOs and there is a 'fit' with the needs of children and young people as perceived by these NGOs, who in some cases have gone on to receive grants. It is clear that NGOs do exist which can deliver services within the BOTA priorities including the more systemic areas – NGO capacity building and Scaling up/Replication – and BOTA has succeeded in reaching most of them with information about the grant programme through NGO networks, informing Akimats and outreach information meetings in the regions. There are some exceptions and respondents advise that a more public campaign – using television and other public media – would strengthen the potential for drawing in greater numbers of relevant community groups and NGOs and stimulating community involvement and support as well as publicising BOTA/SSP results.

Respondents report that lack of expertise are equally as constraining as lack of funding. Areas where expertise could be strengthened that are relevant to the BOTA target beneficiaries include, for example, child and family social work, working with disabled children and their families, child psychology, early childhood education, development of parenting skills and motivating young people into employment and education. Where there is a lack of expertise, there is likely to be a lack of innovation and new approaches without careful interventions to build knowledge, skills and capacity. BOTA appears to be going some way to meeting this need by providing, for example, opportunities for communication with specialists who have up to date experience from other countries and by organising training opportunities for grantees. Save the Children is providing technical support to the BOTA team in terms of child welfare best practices and has provided some inputs to the SSP including two training seminars for SSP grantees in 2010 that covered such topics as early childhood development, youth work and disability. This seems like a low level of support given the breadth of the SSP programmatic areas and the overall lack exposure of Kazakhstan NGOs to international best practices.

In order to further strengthen the SSP programme and ensure that it is not only extending the number and reach of services, but also expanding the type and effectiveness of services available to its target beneficiaries, this programme of technical support for BOTA could be implemented more systematically across the four programmatic areas of SSP. More systematic technical support by Save the Children for the BOTA SSP team, for grantees and for potential applicants (including previously unsuccessful applicants) could help to further extend the range and type of available services, boost the number of NGOs submitting relevant applications, support NGOs and community groups in challenging received ways of addressing social problems for the BOTA target beneficiaries, change mindsets, introduce new and effective ways of working with the target groups and ensure a positive impact on the life situations of the target beneficiary groups.

The open door approach seems to be helping to reduce barriers for more rural and remote community groups and NGOs to access the funding opportunities offered by SSP and the action planning element of the programme seems to be effective in mobilising community activists to take

forward relevant ideas and seek resources for the BOTA target groups in their villages and towns. This is another way in which the BOTA SSP is extending reach and access to relevant social services.

This evaluation has looked at numbers of beneficiaries and the information generated by BOTA's own monitoring and evaluation system and, taken together with the information from the interviews with NGOs it is reasonable to conclude that the grants are generally reaching growing numbers of target beneficiaries in the form of training and skills development of specialists (teachers, psychologists, social workers, disability workers) and young people, community-based support initiatives and direct services to children and young people. NGO capacity is being positively affected both for smaller less experienced organisations and for larger, more experienced organisations.   The language of the respondents in the interviews conducted for this assessment tends to indicate that behaviour change and attitude change is happening among children, parents and young people as well as among specialists and professionals who are working with them, particularly in relation to youth where a large proportion of grants have been awarded so far.

The SSP is developing and introducing more specific indicators that can help to monitor the impact of grants on specific areas of child well-being and development – for example in early childhood development, the programme will monitor the extent to which children benefiting from the early childhood education services being funded by BOTA are acquiring basic educational skills such as literacy and numeracy.   As the programme unfolds, these indicators represent a significant opportunity to capture meaningful and relevant impact data, if they can be effectively introduced into the grants management cycle.   They will need to be clear, simple to gather data on and meaningful in terms of the target beneficiary groups of the SSP grantees.

Effectiveness

The perceptions and statements of the respondents from the NGOs that were interviewed tend to indicate that the SSP grants programme is largely effective in attracting relevant applications from a range of organisations and providing funding for delivery of projects that are having a positive impact on the target beneficiaries. The extent to which the services provided by the NGOs extend and strengthen existing service provision and widen the group of beneficiaries needs to be analysed by BOTA in conjunction with results from BOTA's monitoring and evaluation system, including feedback from target beneficiaries themselves.   The indicator system that the SSP is developing that focuses on specific areas of achievement for each target beneficiary group, along with quantitative monitoring information about numbers of beneficiaries, should help to support this analysis going forward.

Participation of NGOs in competitive tenders to be awarded grants appears to have been determined by the degree of conformity of the grant purposes to the major targets and objectives of the NGO and the competencies and experience of the core staff they plan to involve in implementation. The broadness of the BOTA priorities helps to ensure that NGOs are not suffering from 'mission drift' in order to secure funding. At the same time, where NGOs do not have a mission connected to child or youth welfare, BOTA is achieving its objectives by expanding the target beneficiaries to whom the NGO offers its services. This particularly affects disadvantaged young people, where NGOs might previously have only offered services to adults as with the micro-credit example cited above. In some cases, grants extend NGO activities to children and young people from the BOTA target groups and offer them opportunities they might otherwise not have had, for example tree planting as part of a grant run by an ecology NGO, or making TV and radio programmes as part of a grant run by a media NGO. In these cases, there is a clear benefit to the children and young people while they take part in the project, but a less clear systemic impact on their social problems.

The procedure of notice about grants and preparation of applications is mainly clear to the NGOs and acceptable for execution, except for the following issues: wording of some requirements in the form are difficult to understand (the major reason appears to be an insufficiently adapted translation of the application form from English into Russian and Kazakh); difficulty in understanding the wording by the representatives of rural NGOs, difficulties for some regional NGOs in choosing the grant direction and the project subject. BOTA actually offers considerable levels of support to many applicants to address some of these latter two issues.

The time terms specified by the BOTA Foundation for preparation of the application are typically acceptable for NGOs, but there was quite a lot of variation between NGOs in how long the application actually took. Some NGOs also find the application form repetitive and complex and the requirement to submit many legal documents cumbersome so the new BOTA procedure of requiring legal documents only once the grant has been awarded is welcomed by those NGOs who know about it.

Almost all the NGO representatives stated that they do not consider decisions to reject unsuccessful grant applications as unfair, reserving the right of the BOTA Foundation to make a decision. They appreciate receiving a clear and detailed explanation of why the application was rejected. This is particularly important for rural NGOs to help them avoid making similar mistakes when submitting further applications. Many NGOs emphasised BOTA's transparency and lack of corruption as a donor as an extremely positive point.

According to some of the surveyed NGOs, a major constraint in adequate implementation of the grant projects is the limit imposed by BOTA on remuneration levels for project participants. According to some of these respondents, limited remuneration restricts the recruitment of qualified specialists and as a result they are largely reliant, in some regions on recruiting pensioners or people with other jobs. This can limit the quality of project implementation. The BOTA team continues to monitor this issue, is open to negotiation with NGOs on salary levels, particularly where the NGO can justify the employment of a particular specialist at a higher than average rate and exercises an internal system of control on this issue to make sure that salary levels are reasonable and ultimately sustainable.

The NGOs representatives who work with children and young people with disabilities ask to take into consideration their special needs during project budgeting and approval of the financial reports (flights, accommodation in semi-deluxe rooms where disability access may be an issue, payments for accompanying persons). The BOTA team confirms that SSP is flexible on this point and communicates this flexibility to grantees.

All the NGOs gave positive feedback on the BOTA Foundation activities and assistance of its team during the process of the project implementation, pointing out that they always are ready to give the required explanation and consultations on any complicated issues. However, according to some NGO representatives, representatives of BOTA Foundation sometimes communicated in a style which they perceived as demonstrating a high-handed and mistrustful attitude. This made some of these NGOs feel as if they were supplicants and not equal counterparts in a joint initiative. NGOs also mentioned that they have interacted with several representatives of SSP and sometimes have had to explain repeatedly the same issue to different BOTA staff.

Some of the NGOs interviewed view some of the BOTA Foundation standard financial controls as excessive, for example validation exercises such as making telephone calls to the suppliers in order to confirm the fact of purchasing equipment / materials and contacting grant beneficiaries. A large majority of NGOs interviewed accept these controls as part of the BOTA terms and conditions and see them as necessary, but a few express the view that this type of monitoring can

have a negative impact on the NGOs' image and their relationship with suppliers and beneficiaries, and should perhaps be reviewed.

Many of the complaints voiced by respondents are common to grantees of many grant schemes, particularly in their early stages. Having reviewed the BOTA grant application procedures, formats and reporting requirements it is clear that they are in keeping with best international practice and are not unduly onerous or overly complex compared to similar schemes elsewhere in the region or in Kazakhstan. The views expressed by the interviewees would tend to indicate that they are generally fit for purpose and that many of the perceived problems may lie with the grantees' lack of understanding of basic concepts in project cycle management, financial management, log frames and other grant management instruments. The lack of understanding of qualitative indicators related to 'satisfaction' is demonstrated, for example, in the responses documented above. While the Russian and Kazakh language in the application formats and guidance may be partly responsible, it is not only translation of words and the way in which things are put which appears to be causing problems, it is the very concepts which lie behind the words – objectives, indicators, means of verification etc.

Similarly, the desire expressed by some grantees for more flexibility in managing budgets and setting salaries as well as for less stringent controls from BOTA's side is understandable, but BOTA's caution in introducing carefully structured constraints in order to prevent dependency, support forward planning and prevent the grants from introducing artificial trends into the social sector employment market is also understandable and commendable.

Efficiency

BOTA appears to be pursuing a rigorous and 'hands on' approach to grant management which may have still been evolving during the first rounds, but by rounds 3 and4 have settled into a clear set of rules and regulations with clear guidance and adequate support to potential applicants and grantees which they find complex and challenging but generally acceptable. It is not clear to what extent the data provided by respondents on the annual turnover of their NGOs is reliable, but it tends to indicate that the size of grants being awarded are anything from 50% up to, in some cases many times more than, the NGO's usual turnover. If this is the case, then the cautious and rigorous approach being pursued by BOTA is justified and appropriate as part of a risk management strategy.

The interviews conducted for this assessment tend to suggest that, in spite of some communication problems and issues about mistrust perceived by a few grantees, the support of BOTA SSP staff is highly valued and effective and is considered by grantees to represent a valuable opportunity for growth and strengthening of each NGO whether small or large, city or rural.

Payments are generally timely, support from BOTA staff is generally seen as appropriate and useful to applicants and grantees. Challenges experienced by NGOs in the application process, the implementation and reporting stages are generally accepted as fit for purpose.

The procedure of funding grants is well structured and implemented in practice, so the NGO representatives have no claims against the BOTA Foundation in these terms.

The most critical comments from NGOs towards the BOTA Foundation are related to some of the financial terms and conditions and requirements for financial reporting. Some of these complaints came from grantees that had been awarded grants in earlier rounds and BOTA has since addressed some of these issues, for example the limit of cash spending to 15,000 tenge ($100) per month has been doubled. Some of the other requirements, for example to provide three

commercial proposals for purchasing goods/services which can be difficult to fulfil in rural areas, may need to be explained more clearly to some grantees – they can seek, for example, quotes from other villages and towns. Other financial restrictions that BOTA continues to monitor are the caps on salary levels and proportions of salaries that can be covered by the BOTA grants; the restrictions on NGOs to reallocating funds in the frame of project implementation for other articles of expenditure; and difficulties in re-allocating savings to other items of expenditure under the project implementation.

Sustainability

This is the area which, following this round of interviews, leaves the most questions open. While the NGO respondents give assurances that activities will continue in most cases after BOTA funding, in many cases their proposed strategies for securing further funding seem vague and weak. The short-term nature of the grants does not lend itself to sustainability, but rather to securing short-term quick results. The long-term ground-work to secure community and local government ownership which is necessary to ensure long-term funding and buy-in for new social services is unlikely to be secured within the life-time of 1 year grants. While some NGOs are already in receipt of 2nd, and in some cases 3rd, grants, projects designed as 1 year actions are less likely to contain the actions and management arrangements needed to secure the sustainable changes in terms of behaviours, attitudes, funding, institutional arrangements and ultimately legislation that BOTA may be aiming towards. The introduction of 'renewal' grants this year may go some way towards addressing these issues and increase the sustainability of the investment being made by BOTA at the individual, community and regional levels.

On the other hand, the emphasis on training and expertise being provided by the BOTA SSP programme itself so far is a strong strategy for sustainability – but it requires a systematic approach if the skills and knowledge imparted to key specialists are to be translated into sustainable changes in the types and range of services offered to the NGOs' target beneficiaries.

BOTA seems to be supporting an increase in the numbers of target beneficiaries receiving social services of various types. It is also supporting an increase in the numbers, reach, geographical spread and capacity of NGOs working with target beneficiaries. It appears to be successfully supporting these NGOs to strengthen their skills and understanding of project cycle management, financial management, transparency and accountability for the purpose of implementing BOTA grants. It is not yet clear to what extent BOTA is supporting NGOs to be innovative in developing new and effective approaches across the four target beneficiary areas. Some NGOs have successfully extended service delivery to poor communities and started to replicate or scale up effective services. The indicators being developed by the SSP will help BOTA to assess what the SSP is bringing to NGO social service delivery for its target groups that would otherwise not be happening.

3.2   Recommendations for the SSP programme

Recommendations provided below focus on relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Specifically recommendations are offered at this stage on improving the SSP application process, and improving SSP grant administration based on the interviews with 40 NGO respondents as documented above, interviews with the BOTA SSP and management team and a review of some project applications and grant reports.

These recommendations are offered in the context of recognising that, as outlined in the conclusions above, the SSP operation is largely effective and relevant. The recommendations are offered in response to some of the challenges identified by the evaluation team, BOTA staff and the NGO respondents interviewed for this assessment.

Challenge: perceived saturation of the existing pool of child-focused NGOs and the need to reach out further into rural and remote areas where levels of social services provision to SSP target beneficiaries are very low if not non-existent.

1. Extend training and information opportunities designed for grantees to unsuccessful applicants as well as continue to run information sessions for potential applicants.

Training in the programmatic areas of the SSP which is being offered by Save the Children to SSP grantees can also help previously unsuccessful applicants to better understand the kind of approaches that the SSP is seeking to fund and design more relevant, innovative and effective projects. This could help to extend the reach of the SSP among existing and established NGOs.

The current approach of running regional training and information sessions for potential SSP applicants has proven its worth and should be continued. The 'renewal grant' approach for extending the length of effective service provision and grants should be continued and monitored – this approach also helps to maximise the impact of the programme among the beneficiaries of existing and established NGOs.

2. Continue with the existing approach of 'open door' applications for small grants and existing approaches to reaching out to rural communities. In order to build even further on successes to date in mobilising rural communities to engage with SSP, some of the following steps may be considered:

Make greater systematic use of the CCT volunteers as bearers of BOTA SSP information. The deep penetration of rural areas in 3 oblasts of the country (due to rise to 5 oblasts in 2012) by the CCT programme offers an opportunity for extending the reach of the SSP to a greater number of villages and remote communities. CCT programme volunteers, of which there are currently around 900 (due to rise to 2500), have the functions of community mobilisers who potentially can at the very least inform village inhabitants about the SSP, particularly about the action plan small grants, and at the very most support rural community groups to develop applications.

In non-CCT regions, consider options for sub-contracting or sub-granting to larger regional development NGOs to carry out SSP community mobilisation activities across the four SSP target directions in rural communities. This option was considered and rejected by BOTA for a number of valid reasons, but might be worth re-considering if a priority for the SSP programme is to stimulate community action planning and to widen the number of NGOs and community based organisations working with children and young people in the BOTA target groups.

Challenge: problems experienced by some NGOs in preparing grant applications

3. Review the Russian and Kazakh versions of the application materials and create a glossary and/or footnotes to explain key concepts and terms. Continue to offer seminars and training for potential applicants as is the current practice – these have proven their effectiveness in supporting applicants to develop stronger applications. Continue the practice of offering advice and guidance to applicants.

Challenge: maintaining rigorous financial and grant management controls, while going some way to meeting the concerns of NGOs about overly restrictive budgeting and financial reporting conditions

4. Consider options for permitting NGOs to reallocate savings such as:

- no-cost extensions to the grant contract can permit NGOs to deliver an additional number of services to beneficiaries over a fixed period of time in order to use up any savings

- re-allocate savings within the timeframe of the project contract to reasonably permissible items that can support the NGO in continuing to deliver services to target beneficiaries without motivating them to make savings in order to fund more indirect costs. Items could include: additional specialists, additional training, additional activities for beneficiaries

5. Provide further support, particularly to less experienced NGOs, in understanding and meeting the BOTA budgeting and financial reporting requirements

- the level of support and information is currently quite high, so this may only require identifying and drawing even greater attention to budgeting and financial reporting 'hotspots' both at the application stage and at the point of signing the grant contract with successful applicants. Hotspots identified in this assessment include: rural travel reporting requirements; the need for three quotes for goods and services; caps on the proportions of salaries that can be funded; constraints to expenditure on some types of overheads (eg. rent) and capital expenditure; changes in unit costs eg. for individual items such as pens/water or for more complex items such as the meal costs for individual portions provided to children at summer camps or other project events. The SSP finance and grants management team has a wealth of information and feedback from grantees on these and other areas that tend to cause problems during implementation and the more they can ensure that applicants and grantees are aware of these problem areas, the smoother the implementation process will be.

Challenge: ensuring that the SSP is supporting innovation and challenging established ways of addressing the social problems of the target beneficiaries of the NGOs that BOTA supports

6. Ensure the provision of technical assistance to the BOTA SSP team and to grantees is systematic and strategic in addressing identified areas of lack of knowledge and skills that are constraining Kazakhstan NGOs in addressing the needs of the BOTA SSP target beneficiaies. Extend, as far as possible, access to this technical assistance to potential SSP applicants (including formerly unsuccessful applicants) as per recommendation 1.

Save the Children has the remit to support BOTA with child welfare technical assistance and can identify the areas where NGOs require technical support and guidance in order to take forward their practices. The following areas were identified during this assessment, but are by no means definitive and a proper training needs assessment should form the basis of any technical assistance strategy going forward:

- case management in child and family social work which is based on the principle of thorough multi-faceted assessment of the child and family's needs, joint planning by social worker and family of actions and regular review

- further building of understanding of a social model of disability and an approach to working with children with disabilities which is based on flexible, individualised packages of services and support to meet needs that are identified jointly with the child/young person and his or her parents/carers

- further building understanding of psycho-social services for children and families at risk including individual and family counselling and other 'talking therapies'. Building further understanding of parent training programmes that have been proven to be effective in changing parenting behaviours, increasing understanding of the needs of children at different developmental stages including early childhood and adolescence

7. Continue with the exercise to develop meaningful indicators for monitoring implementation and impact of the SSP on children and young people.

These indicators need to be simple (not too many), relevant to the 4 programmatic areas and easy to collect data for otherwise it may not be possible to introduce them into the project management cycle. Leading grantees from each programme area as well as child welfare expertise from Save the Children could usefully support the BOTA team in developing the indicators and the data collection mechanisms for monitoring them.