



Toolkit on
Accountable

and Transparent

Service Delivery

at a Local Level

About participatory mechanisms
and civil society interventions



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Dear reader,

The Union of Municipalities of Montenegro (UoM) and the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International) are proud to present to you this toolkit about accountable and transparent service delivery at the local level. This publication is the product of two years of intensive cooperation between the UoM and VNG International within the project “Increasing accountability and transparency at the municipal level in Montenegro”. This project was financed by the Social Transformation Programme Central and Eastern Europe (Matra) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The development of this publication contributed to the realization of a number of measures and activities from the “Action Plan for the implementation of the programme for combating corruption at the local level (2008–2011)”.

As the word ‘toolkit’ and the subtitle ‘about participatory mechanisms and civil society interventions’ suggest, this publication provides its readers with practical examples and useful tools and tips on how to include participatory mechanisms in the daily work of local governments and civil society organizations. The aim of the toolkit is to provide both a theoretical framework on accountability, transparency and public ethics and practical examples of how local governments and civil society organizations from West and South-East Europe use participatory mechanisms to improve their service delivery and to include their citizens in public decision making.

We hope the content of the toolkit will inspire many local governments and civil society organizations to apply a participative approach during their daily work. And that by doing this, accountability and transparency at the municipal level will increase.



Mr. Rajko Golubović
Secretary-general UoM



Mr. Peter Knip
Director VNG International

Increasing accountability and transparency at the municipal level in Montenegro

A democratic challenge

Working on improvements of accountability and transparency of the public administration is a strong contribution to the democratic quality of (local) government. Especially at the local level this is an important challenge.

GOOD LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Minimises corruption, takes the views of minorities into account and ensures the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making:

It is responsive to present and future needs of society

Local government is a portal to government as a whole, so results in increasing accountability and transparency at a local level will be a contribution to the **credibility** of the public administration as a whole.

In a democratic society representation is a main principal

In a democratic society **representation is a main principal**. Periodically citizens mandate their elected representatives. They delegate a small piece of their autonomy to people, to candidates they trust. It is the basis of democracy. At different levels in the political theatre this act is a crucial part of the relation between voters and elected representatives. It is one of the three basic elements in the triangle of legitimacy. This first element of representative legitimacy – **trust** – is the main responsibility of the elected Assembly (all members of parliament together). The second element is the relation between the Assembly and the governing management (the board, the cabinet, the Mayor). This relation is **about reliability**, which we can regard this as institutional legitimacy. Which is the main responsibility of the governing body. The third element regards **satisfaction** and is bound to good public services. Satisfying public needs is the main responsibility of the organization in general – and with this of all public servants – but the CEO of the public administration has the final responsibility.

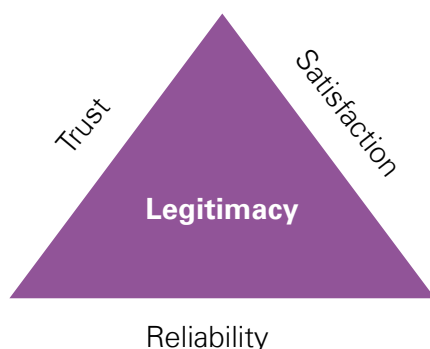


Figure 1 – Triangle of legitimacy

This mathematical figure (*Figure 1*) visualizes the importance of taking care of legitimacy. Trust, reliability and satisfaction are interacting elements in ensuring the system will remain, as if it is a roof. **Transparency and accountability are important pillars**. They are important in an organisational culture to prevent the public administration and the political leadership from corruption and fraud in the different dimensions of the relation between citizens and government.

¹ Taken from prof. Theo Toonen, professor in Public Administration Leiden University

Dimensions of citizenship

Citizens and governments relate to each other in different dimensions². The citizen is the client who places high requirements on service delivery. The citizen is also the voter who, through his/her vote, invests in a relationship of trust with the elected representatives. Furthermore, the citizen is also a co-producer of policy. The local administration regularly calls on citizens to create policy in a participative manner. Lastly, the citizen is part of a civil community in which the local administration is the authority and the citizen the subject. The table below provides an overview of these four dimensions.

4 dimensions of the relation between citizens and (local) government	
Citizen	Local government
Client	←→ Service provider
Voter	←→ Elected representative
Co-producer of policy	←→ Policy maker
Subject	←→ Authority

At local level these dimensions are the most tangible because the local government and the local public administration is the governmental layer closest to the citizens. In this way the relation between citizen and (local) authority can be regarded as a source of power and authority relevant for the democratic system in general.

Visible and vulnerable

The proximity of the local government is determined by two aspects: **visibility and vulnerability**. Especially in terms of accountability and transparency these aspects are important. Accountability is bound to people you can meet at the market, in the pub and in local news-media.

Visibility makes governments more open and can be regarded as an opportunity: what you see is what you get. Results are measurable and can be used directly by citizens and companies: this can range from a construction permit to a clean street after establishing a public waste-collection service.

Proximity creates **vulnerability** and can be a threat. Every step a local administration makes can be regarded as a public gesture from individuals as well as from parts of the organization. This implies that people may expect an explanation for every step made by civil servants or political representatives, even when there is no (formal) reason. Especially in times of political pressure, governmental activities can be made more complicated because of this. Proximity in terms of being neighbours (sometimes literally) makes it even more difficult. Personal circumstances, old relations, family-obligations can cause expectations of a special treatment which cannot be fulfilled when working according to the rule of law. So proximity on a local level can be a strength in the relation between citizens and the public administration and a weakness as well.

Visibility makes governments more open and can be regarded as an opportunity

² See for a more extensive explanation the toolkit "Service delivery, a challenge for local government" VNG International, programme LOGO East www.vng-international.nl

Legitimacy is hard work

It is a duty to actively work on avoiding too many risks with the legitimacy of the democratic system. It always remains work of people and not of machines. The complicated relations with citizens demand a constant elaboration of the public servants and the political authorities. Every small mistake in terms of integrity of a person can mean damage to the organisation as a whole. This is not easy to manage, but on the other side: it is a question for all governments, all over the world. So good and bad practices can be found everywhere.

What can be found, for example, are **Codes of conduct** that are used to manage the daily acting of (local) governors, Assembly-members and civil servants in a proper and transparent way. To be clear about this is an investment in trust. So be open about using a code, it can be regarded as a kind of public shield. It is a statement on being fair and being committed to **integrity**. It underlines the necessity of the moral standards in the public sector, and even broader, it can be a signal to private sector too, a sign of credibility and a positive incentive to tax payers: "in the public sector we take good care of your money". We spend it on public goods, on trustworthy government.

Local government should be open to the ideas of citizens

Partners in credibility and trust

Politicians, public servants and other public actors like companies, NGO's and individual citizens are all partners in trustworthy government. This needs a constant training "on the job", and awareness of the importance of reliability, credibility and trust.

This means a permanent elaboration of transparency in the relation between citizens and the (local) public administration. **Integrity and participation** need each other, meaning that, first of all, local government and local public servants should be **open to information needs** of citizens, companies etc. It means that citizens and companies should be informed about decision making in general but also about the conditions of more individualized procedures (building-permits; licence to sell goods at a market etc.)

Secondly, local government should be **open to the ideas of citizens**. Whenever the city-council is preparing a decision about, for example, difficult and complex issues but also when they are discussing the annual budget, they should consider to consult the citizens. This is not necessary for every step but when local governments aim to build a strong basis for tough decisions it could be wise to use the ideas and input of the community. A local government must always be **prepared to incorporate the involvement** of citizens from very different motives. This is not always easy and it asks for **a balance between distance and commitment** of the authorities. But it is an asset to be aware of the opportunities of active interaction with your population also in terms of keeping up trust and reliability to keep the motor of the democratic system running.

In the end one has to realize that **integrity is at risk** when a local government is not aware of a couple of **do's and don'ts**. Transparency at the individual level as a civil servant but especially as a politician, being a public authority, is crucial. That means to be transparent about received presents, travels, visits. Implement transparent procedures on public jobs and relations and separate responsibilities as much as possible. Fair government is based on the principle that servants – either appointed or elected – can be trusted as independent actors in working on the supply of public goods for all citizens.

In the end

To be responsive in different ways is the core business of public government. It creates a basis for an open and democratic society with a good balance between citizens and the public administration. Being the representatives of the citizens, elected politicians should be aware of their though but honourable position in the heart of the public administration. Keeping up trust should be their first goal. This forms the basis to work out effective government and efficient service-delivery at all levels of society.



Standards of public ethics

For a society to be democratic, every member needs to participate in public life

“Standards of public ethics in local self-government in Montenegro” is a document which defines standards for achieving a transparent, accountable and efficient local self-government. The Standards have been developed within the Program “Strengthening of the local self-government in Montenegro 2009-2011, Phase II” implemented by the Council of Europe and supported by EU. The Standards for Montenegro have been prepared jointly by the experts from the Council of Europe and experts of the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro. The implementation of the identified standards and the establishment and attending of ethical public life and ethical environment, which is a condition for a transparent, accountable and efficient local self-government, is the responsibility of the management and political elite in the local self-government. They should provide examples by promoting accountability, professionalism and behaviour in line with ethical rules and standards and thus introduce new values and initiate changes within the local self-government.

Standards of public ethics which apply to the Montenegrin local self-governments are based on, and match standards of, public ethics for effective and democratic local self-government of the Council of Europe, but they are at the same time adjusted to our conditions and legal system. The purpose of defining and adopting the document “Standards of public ethics in local self-government in Montenegro” by local governments is to help them achieve a high level of public ethics in their work. In its essence, this document is intended to be used for achieving a transparent, accountable and efficient local self-government. Standards are also used as instruments in the local self-government for implementing organizational change and for creating an organizational culture, as a system of behavioural values and norms in the local self-government.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Implementation of organizational change always implies a change to the way of work and behaviour. However, organizational change cannot be implemented if changes are not made to opinions and behaviour of individuals and groups in a community, which is a requirement for improving key competencies of a local self-government.

Implementing organizational change requires from a local self government to:

- Increase transparency in the work of municipal bodies;
- Ensure that users of services have information and documents available in advance in compliance with limitations that exist only when they are established by the Law;
- Put mechanisms in place for implementing procedures and regular monitoring and evaluation of the procedures;

- Ensure participation of citizens in the process of planning and shaping services according to their needs;
- Build strong partnerships with civil and private sectors;
- Ensure responsible behaviour of management, elected representatives and employees in a local self-government, which is compliant with ethical rules and standards of behaviour.

The process of organizational change should lead to the development of leadership and organizational learning. Organizational learning, as a result of undertaken organizational change, leads to improvement of the key competencies of an organization. In our case, the process of organizational change and organizational learning leads to a more transparent, more accountable and more efficient local self-government. Because of the changes, the local government becomes able to respond to requirements and needs of its citizens and businesses in a local community. Management and elected representatives in a local self-government should initiate changes and start a process of organizational learning in a local self-government. That is why we say that they are, before everybody else, responsible for creating a culture, as a system of values of the method of work and behaviour within a local self-government and for achieving key principles that the local self-government is based on: achieving public interest, transparency and accountability in the work of bodies and all individuals who perform public functions or perform as public services.

A municipality is like any other organization. What applies to accountable and efficient actions of any organization applies to a municipality as well: a clear division of roles and responsibilities, defined working procedures, planning and shaping of services according to needs and requirements of beneficiaries, accountable financial management, transparency of work, development of staff, good communication, exploring satisfaction of beneficiaries with services provided, etc.

The process of organizational change should lead to the development of leadership and organizational learning

ROLE OF STANDARDS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Standards allow local self-governments to assess their efficiency in six key fields of public ethics:

1. Transparent provision of services;
2. Accountability;
3. Participation of citizens;
4. Professionalism;
5. Transparent decision-making;
6. Leadership.

The standards in these fields support organisational learning and contribute to the improvement of the work of local self-government. What we call organizational knowledge exists in a municipality as it does in any other organization.

This implies skills, knowledge and abilities shared by employees of the local self-government. Within every standard, levels of works and achieved results are provided. In addition, positive and negative indicators are provided for every standard and they offer evidence for the level of the respective local self-government. In all six areas of public ethics, there are key matters which are additionally used for identifying levels.

Standards are used by local self-governments to perform a self-assessment or to evaluate the success of the work of local self-government by consultants, or by a “team of peers” comprising 3-4 members of other local self-governments. These assessment methods aim to provide recommendations that will be used for the preparation of an improvement plan. An improvement plan consists of measures, activities and a time frame related to the necessary improvements of the work of local administration in compliance with given standards.

STANDARD 1 – “Transparent provision of services”

Readiness for transparency of decisions and activities that local governments want to undertake or are undertaking, existence of documents on types of services, description of services, procedures for assessing how relevant services are, satisfaction of beneficiaries with provision of services, information to employees and citizens about local policies and activities implemented by municipalities, etc.

Achieving of this standard in a local self-government requires the following:

- Provision of information for beneficiaries in an easy and accessible manner on: types of services, procedures for provision of services; submission of requests/applications; deadlines for making decision; criteria for making decisions; appeal procedure and costs incurred by provision of services;
- Ensured satisfaction of beneficiaries through an established practice for receiving feedback from beneficiaries and taking them into account;
- Civil servants and local population are well-informed about local policies and they consult about municipal plans.

STANDARD 2 – “Accountability”

Development and implementation of quality procedures for fighting against corruption and unethical behaviour in a local self-government. Next to this the revision of procedures aimed at improvement of ethical behaviour in a municipality and ensuring public trust.

Achieving of this standard in a local self-government requires the following:

- Clear guidelines established for actions of local employees who are involved in the decision-making process and training provided to them;
- Clear mechanisms established for auditing and internal control of implementation of procedures;
- It is ensured that conflict of interests are made public and steps are undertaken to ensure that they do not affect decision-making;
- Independent decision making on appeals and complaints;
- Public procurements are managed efficiently and effectively in a way that ensures that municipalities and their citizens get appropriate value or services for their money;
- Procedures and achieved results are reviewed to minimize opportunities for prohibited activities and actions are implemented in compliance with the public procurement procedures;
- Effective internal communication is in place and it is ensured that all local employees and civil servants are well-aware of the development of services and procedures.

STANDARD 3 – “Participation of citizens – consultations in decision-making”

Existence of a clearly established framework in terms of the method and procedure for consulting with citizens and all stakeholders in a community, access to information, decisions and activities undertaken in the municipality, and transparency and limitations that apply to local employees.

In order to achieve this standard a local self-government should:

- Consult with citizens during the decision-making process;
- Make sure that citizens are well-informed; seek for, listen and respond to their opinion and welcome feedback on experiences of beneficiaries of services;
- Create opportunities for citizens to participate in planning and shaping of municipal services;
- Use different mechanisms to encourage and include citizens in the decision-making process;
- Strengthen the role of local communities to ensure their stronger influence and participation in deciding at local level;
- Build strong partnerships with local organizations (NGOs and private sector), and with other governmental levels to ensure more efficient provision of services;
- Consult local organizations when deciding and defining local policies.

Create opportunities for citizens to participate in planning and shaping of municipal services

All employees are informed about the rules of conduct in terms of employment, advancement and rewarding

STANDARD 4 – “Professionalism”

To provide orientation in terms of standards and guidelines for employees on how they should work and perform their roles and responsibilities, method of employment, criteria for rewarding and career advancement, and training and professional development of employees.

In order to achieve this standard, the following is required:

- Clear procedures and selection criteria in place for selection of candidates (also known by the candidates);
- Clear job descriptions and guidelines for performing work in place for every position;
- Ensuring permanent training of local employees and civil servants (incl public ethics programmes) to ensure they are competent and aware of their roles and responsibilities;
- All employees are informed about the rules of conduct in terms of employment, advancement and rewarding;
- Reviewing of implementation and results of processes of employment, training and advancement, and undertaking improvements accordingly;
- Implementation of a clear and transparent process of the drafting of improvement plans which are solely based on performance assessments.

STANDARD 5 – “Transparent decision-making”

To define the role of the municipality in providing information to citizens and other stakeholders in the community, revenues and expenditures, programmes, plans and activities which are important for local population, and decisions on allocation of funds which should be subject to independent supervision.

In order to achieve this standard, local self-government should:

- Ensure that information is provided to citizens, NGOs and private sector with regard to municipal income/sources and amount of income and expenditures in an easily understandable and accessible manner;
- Ensure that all decisions can be justified in terms of the value, value for money and/or interest for the municipality, its citizens and other stakeholders;
- Ensure that appeal and complaint procedures are known to the public, and that the public has easy access to them;
- Elected representatives, officials and officers must report conflicts of interest and withdraw from the decision-making process in case of a conflict of interest;

- Ensure that the agenda for the municipal assembly sessions contains time, day and venue of the session, and that minutes and decisions are published on, for example, the municipal web-site;
- Ensure the decision-making process regarding funds, income, obligations of citizens and other entities, and costs for service provision is transparent, and that citizens are involved in the process;
- Establish criteria that will be used in making decisions and allocating funds in advance;
- Ensure that decisions are subject to strict procedures: external (audit) and internal control.

STANDARD 6 – “Leadership”

The existence of clear responsibilities of elected representatives, officials and employees in a local self-government as established by ethical codes. Without development of leadership there is no organizational learning because leadership ensures all components that establish a context of organizational learning: organizational structure, culture, changes, communication, etc.

In order to achieve this standard, the local self-government should:

- Adopt and develop a plan to promote the defined ethical standards and the ethical code in the municipality;
- Establish objectives for improvement in the field of public ethics and review to what extent these objectives have been achieved;
- Ensure accountability for the provision of advice in relation to the ethical code;
- Compare procedures and activities related to complying with ethical standards with other local self-government units and organizations;
- Integrate standards of public ethics into activities, plans and decisions made by the local self-government;
- Promote standards of public ethics in public procurement procedures;
- Deliver training to employees, assess risks and ensure rotation of employees in order to reduce opportunities for prohibited operations and actions.

POSITION OF MONTENEGRIN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS IN RELATION TO THE DEFINED STANDARDS

Within the programme “Building Local Self Government in Montenegro 2009-2011, Phase II” which related to public ethics in local self-governments (funded by the EU and implemented by the Council of Europe with involvement of the Union of Municipalities) an assessment related to standards of public ethics has been conducted. The assessment was performed in the municipality of Nikšić and the Old Capital Cetinje. The aim of the assessment was to provide an objective overview and assessment of the work of these two local self-governments.

Without development of leadership there is no organizational learning

The performance assessment of the municipality of Nikšić and Old Capital Cetinje contains strengths and recommendations related to the fields in which the work of local self-government can improve with regard to the before mentioned "Standards of public ethics in local self-government in Montenegro". It is important to point out that the assessment was performed for the achieved results related to each standard and that the recommendations were given for undertaken activities and measures, i.e. guidelines for developing of the improvement plan for every defined standard. In the municipality of Nikšić the following results have been achieved:

- Establishment of Citizens Bureau and Information Centre;
- Manual for citizens on mechanisms of participation in decision-making process adopted;
- Communication Strategy developed;
- Guidelines for local self-government and free access to information developed;
- All before mentioned documents are available on the municipal web-site.
- Procedures for reporting of conflicts of interest have been established;
- Public procurement procedures are managed efficiently and effectively;
- Efficiency has been achieved in issuing construction permits.

In addition, a way to consult with citizens and collecting citizens' needs is defined. Employees attend training courses which are delivered in relation to transparency, the municipality is developing partnerships with NGOs and with the private sector. There are clear procedures in place for employing local employees and civil servants, mandatory training has been introduced for new employees in the field of public ethics, and there is a clear job description for every position. Decision-making process related to funds is open and transparent, there is external and internal control in place. Agenda of sessions, time and venue and decisions made are available to all interested citizens on the web-site. The municipality has defined a vision for an ethical code in fighting corruption, ethical codes are adopted and made available to everyone. This is the first municipality where Ethical Committees have been established.

Also in the Old Capital Cetinje, some major improvements have been made. For example, a clear vision and readiness of the new management to undertake activities in terms of organizational changes, establishment of a new method of work, building efficiency and transparency. They intend to draft appropriate guidelines and manuals. There is a reception office, which functions as a Citizens Bureau. A new web-site is developed, and Guidelines for Free Access to Information are adopted. Employees participate in training courses, seminars and various workshops. The general public is informed about income and expenditures, a method of consulting with citizens is defined, citizens' needs are identified.

Local self-government has a clear opinion about the need to intensify and develop partnerships with non-governmental organizations and private sector. Important documents are subject to public hearings. Procedures have been identified for employing local employees and civil servants. The process of making decisions about income and expenditures is open and transparent. An ethical code has been adopted for elected representatives and officials as well as an Ethical Code for local employees and civil servants. Decisions on ethical commissions have been made.

RECOMMENDATION

The general assessment for both municipalities is that the municipal management, elected representatives and employees of the local self-government show a clear orientation and readiness to improve work and achieve the highest possible level of transparency, accountability and efficiency of work. Hence, the most important recommendation for other municipalities is to establish commitment for the goal to increase the level of transparency, accountability and efficiency.



Lessons to be learned from pilot projects



Five pilot projects have been implemented in the municipalities of Pljevlja, Nikšić, Tivat, Podgorica and Bijelo Polje between October 2010 and July 2011 within the project ‘Increasing accountability and transparency at the municipal level in Montenegro’ which is funded by the Social Transformation Programme Central and Eastern Europe (Matra) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and implemented by VNG International and the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro.

This chapter presents the results achieved by the five pilot projects that were part of the project.

THE PILOT PROJECTS

Project 1

CITIZENS BUREAU

Project partners: Municipality of Bijelo Polje and NGO Modus Acquirendi

Project objective: Improving efficiency and mutual relations between the local self-government and citizens, with strengthening of the role and active participation of citizens in decision-making process. Citizens will be able to practice their rights and obligations through the Citizens Bureau.

Achieved results: This project provided citizens with all the necessary information and guidelines on how to practice their rights in a single place. The Citizens Bureau is located in the municipal building, on the ground floor, and thus more accessible to citizens. A function of this Bureau is also related to providing information about activities of municipal bodies, planned public hearings, Assembly sessions and other activities which are directly important for citizens. The use of this Bureau is made easier for citizens through the distribution of brochures and other promotion and educational material, which explains how to practice their citizen rights efficiently and how to use services of the municipality. It is planned to place payment machines on four locations in town and one in a suburb, which would make payment of public utilities and other bills even easier.

The establishment of the Citizens Bureau provides direct benefits to employees of the local self-government as well, because the Bureau makes working conditions much easier and thus the work is more efficient. Four employees are employed by the Bureau and they are the ones who gained experience by working in the Sector for urban planning and public utilities, the Mayor’s cabinet and the chief administrator’s unit. During the project, the project team faced circumstances that made the project implementation difficult, this primarily related to the replacement of the Mayor and to the restructuring of the municipal management, which shows that continuous political support is important for successful innovations.

Project 2

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN THE MUNICIPALITY: BUILDING TRANSPARENCY IN THE WORK OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES AND BETTER PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Strategy in the municipality: Building transparency in the work of local administrative bodies and better participation of citizens in the decision-making process.

Project partners: Nikšić municipality and NGO “Bolja budućnost”

Project objective: To improve internal and external communication in the municipal administration, improving provision of services to citizens and information flow by adopting communication strategy and creating grounds for E-government (establishing Info – Centre). This would improve participation of citizens in the decision-making process at local level.

Achieved results: A systematic, professional and step by step approach contributed to achieving exceptional results towards long-term improvement of transparency and accountability of the work of municipal bodies. The Communication Strategy has been developed and adopted and the process of its development involved citizens, media and employees of municipal bodies. Contributions were collected by using a few “channels”: questionnaires on how citizens perceive relations with the municipality management and what improvements they propose, focus groups with citizens, media representatives, employees of municipal bodies, direct participation of the representatives of non-governmental sector in writing of parts of documents, public hearing about the Strategy, presentation of the Strategy to the Parliament, non-governmental sector and local communities which was covered by media and followed by appearances in media.

In addition, equipment for the info-centre has been procured and members of the project team visited the municipality of Bar to learn about experiences in establishing E-Government. Secretariats “opened their doors” to citizens by allowing them access during all working hours, new, direct e-mail addresses have been provided for, the municipality is more present in local communities and villages through visits of municipal staff and media activities.

A special value to this project is the fact that the project team kept seeking and finding solutions to occasional difficulties. For example, the citizens’ response was improved when the project team started using a number of channels of communication – media, brochures, direct meetings within focus groups, presentations and consultations. In addition, a systematic approach and alignment with the long-term development vision of the municipality is noticeable which guarantees the sustainability of the achieved results.

*Long-term
improvement of
transparency and
accountability
of the work of
municipal bodies*

*Improving
conditions of living
in residential
buildings*

Project 3

INFO BULLETIN – IMPROVING PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN THE LIFE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF PLJEVLJA

Project partners: Municipality of Pljevlja and Association of Youth

Project objective: To improve direct participation of citizens of the municipality of Pljevlja in the decision-making process at local level until the end of 2012. The specific project objective was focused on education of citizens about their rights, regulations and procedures through a free of charge Info-bulletin, which would be distributed both in town and to distant local communities and villages.

Achieved results: Three issues of the bulletin were prepared and distributed during the project. The first issue offered citizens information about ongoing activities and successes of municipal authorities, and it was prepared as the “celebration issue” for the Day of the Municipality. The second issue was almost entirely dedicated to the municipal budget and thus allowed citizens to monitor implementation of planned activities. The third issue presented the work of the Assembly at its most recent session and the visit of the Prime Minister of Montenegro to Pljevlja.

What is characteristic of this project is that this was the first attempt to inform citizens about how funds from the municipal budget are used. Furthermore, it attempted to provide written information primarily for the rural population. Pljevlja is a rather scattered municipality, where the population from mountainous villages rarely communicate with municipal institutions and are not sufficiently informed about developments in town and the municipality. The distribution of the bulletins was performed door-to-door and through local communities, this is where the partner NGO had a large role. The NGO was responsible for the distribution of the bulletin, and its members participated very actively in the preparation of the concept of the bulletin, using their knowledge of citizens’ needs, and in creating the contents of the bulletin. The bulletin is sustainable because its financing for the future period is planned to come out of the municipal budget. Also, from the beginning, this project has been highly supported by the Mayor and the Assembly.

Project 4

DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION BROCHURE ABOUT RESIDENTIAL APARTMENTS IN THE CAPITAL CITY

Project partners: Municipality of Podgorica and the Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognoses

Project objective: Improving conditions of living in residential buildings by providing information to condominium owners and tenants about where and what procedures they can use to practice their rights, but also about obligations they assume by buying apartments (for example, maintenance joint areas)

Achieved results: The first activity in this project was a study on the number of residential buildings and condominiums, the number of established Assemblies of Condominium Owners and the current situation in terms of maintenance of joint areas in the condominiums. This study was conducted in cooperation with the NGO. It was found that only 25% of the buildings have Assemblies of Condominium Owners established. Next to this, it became clear that the maintenance of the joint areas is assumed to be done by these citizens' bodies, but that these bodies do not exist in most of the buildings. Finally, the citizens were not informed about their rights and obligations in terms of maintenance of the buildings. This defined the direction of further activities and the justification for the project.

A thousand copies of the brochure containing the most important information about rights and obligations of condominium owners were prepared and distributed with certain difficulties and variations in relation to the originally planned activities and without further participation of the NGO. The content of the brochure was divided into several sections: Good Host (rights and obligations of tenants, legal framework), Pay Attention (how to look after condominiums and joint areas), Building Manager (rights and obligations of the Manager), Assembly of Tenants (rights and obligations of the Assembly), Installations and Malfunctioning in Condominiums (how to repair), Culture of Habitation (rules and house rules, rules for keeping pets), Adaptation of Condominiums (how to renovate condominiums without disturbing other tenants) and Useful Telephone Numbers and Addresses.

Also, the citizens are better informed about the services of the Housing Agency of the Capital City, and they are encouraged to establish Assemblies of Tenants in case this has not been done yet. With this project, improved participation of citizens in maintaining joint areas was achieved, and thus better quality of living.

Improving the efficiency of the work of the local administration in the field of urban planning

Project 5

ONE STEP OFFICE

Project partners: Municipality of Tivat, Youth Council and Association for Prevention of Addiction "Pravi put"

Project objective: To contribute to building transparency and accountability by improving the efficiency of the work of the local administration in the field of urban planning by establishing a "One Step Office" where services related to deciding upon cases and issuing of permits are provided more efficiently and more transparently.

Achieved results: Project activities were implemented through a systematic and professional work of the project team, with great support of the Mayor and with financial contribution of the municipalities, some difficulties were addressed along the way. Citizens were involved in the project from the beginning by being interviewed in order to check the need for improving the efficiency of the sector for urban development. The survey showed that citizens saw opportunities for improving the quality of municipal services by establishing E-government in the field of urban planning. Both NGOs participated in the decision-making process and in the implementation of the project activities.

A basis had been created for a One step office: equipment was procured and the software which allows citizens to follow up on the status of their requests on the web-site was installed; employees of the municipality were trained to use the electronic system of preparation and following up on cases; software was procured which allows to communicate decisions upon requests to citizens by mobile telephony, and finally, this system was publicly presented to citizens and it was covered by media.

The system of E-government not only provides for transparency to citizens, but also ensures better monitoring of the work of municipal employees by their superiors, which improves accountability and efficiency and provides for a more realistic assessment of employees. The project team was supported by the Mayor and the Assembly throughout the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

Experiences gained by the implementation of the pilot projects are valuable because it shows potential problems but also some good solutions the pilot projects found for achieving better transparency and accountability in the work of local self-governments.

Good practice can be seen in:

- Continuous support of members of Parliament, employees of municipal bodies and the Mayor;
- Equal participation of NGOs as representatives of direct beneficiaries, i.e. citizens in project planning and implementation;
- Focus on specific problems (for example, insufficient information to urban and rural population in regards to projects and activities of the Municipality (Pljevlja), residents of buildings about their rights and obligations in terms of maintenance of joint areas and condominiums (Podgorica), improving of efficiency in addressing requests of citizens filed with the sector for urbanism (Tivat), long-term solution to procedures of information and communication within municipal bodies and with citizens (Nikšić) and distant service that citizens communicate with (Bijelo Polje);
- Identification of problems in the project implementation and finding timely solutions (example of project team of the municipality of Nikšić: intense information campaign improved the number of citizens who participate in creating municipal strategies and related materials);
- The use of modern information technology: establishing E-government (Tivat, Bijelo Polje, Nikšić) in order to raise the quality of work, transparency and accountability at local level;
- Strategic and step by step approach: adoption of long-term communication strategies and providing information to citizens at all times and in all places; assessing the needs of citizens and adjusting the work of municipal administration bodies to those needs (Nikšić, Tivat).

Good solutions for achieving better transparency and accountability in the work of local self-governments

Problems and challenges in the project implementation were related to:

- Changes in the structure of decision-makers (new Mayor, for example) and thus varying support to the project implementation;
- Changes to the project team as a result of withdrawal of the NGO from the project implementation, or leaving of team members from the municipality administration;
- Certain level of sluggishness in responding to problems occurring in the project implementation; looking for excuses for unimplemented activities instead of solutions;
- Underused local and national media for the project promotion that would lead to improved transparency; certain level of “modesty” of project teams who had not realized that they hold valuable and interesting information that would be attractive to media as well;
- Focus on communication with citizens which is, however, dominated by one-way information: the municipality informs citizens instead of having a two-way process by finding new channels and ways to win trust and obtain proposals from citizens (for example, no “blank page” in info-bulletin which could be used by citizens to write their proposals and send them to the municipality).



Awareness of citizens and local self-government in relation to accountability and transparency

In the last ten years, since the process of local self-government reform started in Montenegro, there has been a broad consensus of all political and social structures on key objectives of the local self-government reform and the establishment of a democratic, decentralized and professional system of the local self-government in Montenegro. A number of important programmes and projects have been completed or are being implemented in order to build and strengthen legal, financial and institutional framework of the local self-government, build its capacities, achieve transparency, accountability and efficiency of work, build capacities and develop accountable governance in the local self-government, etc., with significant financial and expert assistance and support of international organisations.

There has been a change of awareness in the local self-government

One of the key objectives of further reform of the local self-government that is specified by the new strategic document adopted by the Government of Montenegro in March 2011, the “Strategy of the Reform of Public Administration in Montenegro 2011-2016”, is set to be “Transparent work of local self-government bodies based on ethical actions of employees, with high participation of citizens and other stakeholders in conducting of public affairs”.

Activities related to the local self-government reform have affected the development of awareness in the local self-government and of citizens in terms of their roles, tasks and responsibilities. Public opinion is formed about the fact that transparent and accountable local self-government knows the real needs and interests of its citizens, addresses them quickly and efficiently, decides in the interest of citizens, and with their full participation ensures cheaper provision of its services, builds influence of civil society on its work, plans and develops human capacities, and works and acts on values specified by ethical rules of conduct which apply to local self-government.

Consequently, it can be stated that there has been a change of awareness in the local self-government in terms of the method of its work, performance of public function by elected representatives and the governing structure, and in terms of the role and accountability of local self-government employees. There is a clear position regarding the need to build a system of employees in the local self-government in which employees need to be educated, motivated, apolitical, and who essentially want to contribute to a faster economic development of the local community, improved provision of services and more efficient work, with maximum participation of citizens, civil society organisations and the private sector in the decision-making process.

Also, a lot has been said about the governing structure as creative staff of the local self-government, who should guide the work of employees towards achieving defined objectives, who take into account opinions and all criticism of citizens, value their proposals and initiatives, and based on that plan and guide employees towards implementing the segment of work and method of performance which ensures a transparent, accountable and efficient work of a local self-government.

As for citizens, there has been a new way of thinking and opinion about their position and the role in achieving a transparent, accountable and efficient local self-government. There is also a strong advocacy of better information and wider consultations with citizens in the process of planning and decision making, and of their participation in the implementation thereof. Citizens are able to express and define better their opinion about the local self-government they want to have, to better understand their role and accountability and to be aware of benefits of implementation of the principle of transparency and accountability in the local self-government.

The public is of the opinion that, in addition to the local self-government, citizens are also responsible for participating in the decision-making process at the local level. There is also criticism stating that all documents and acts adopted by local self-government authorities should be the subject of their interest, and not only those which are directly related to some of their personal rights and interests, or related to their individual obligations. Of course, the credit for the thinking and public opinion about accountability of bodies, local self-government employees and citizens should be also given to the civil sector which has been dealing intensively with the local self-government and the development of local democracy.

HOW TO IMPROVE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY?

Consequently, it is often discussed what a local self-government should do to be transparent, accountable and efficient, how to encourage its citizens to participate in the decision-making process, how and why citizens need to be involved in processes of planning and decision-making at local level and how they can affect and contribute to the identification of the best solutions for them and the development of the community. Also, a lot of discussions are related to new forms of public participation, use of various mechanisms for encouraging their participation, importance of timely information and consultations, appreciation of their good proposals and initiatives by the local self-government bodies and providing feedback to citizens about their opinions and positions.

In addition, legal activities and other initiatives have been developed for simplifying procedures, shortening periods for obtaining permits and approval and creating conditions for better investment climate and business development in the local self-government. In some administration fields (for instance, spatial planning and construction of buildings, etc.), procedures for obtaining approvals and permits for citizens and other entities will be implemented through "one stop shops" with substantially lower costs for them.

What should a local self-government should do to be transparent, accountable and efficient

*Development
of mutual trust
and partnership
between the local
self-government
and citizens*

Financial burdens and expenditures incurred by provision of services by the local self-government have been reduced in a number of other administration fields as well, which provided citizens and other entities with more advantageous positions.

A number of models, agreements, decisions and other documents, which establish institutional mechanisms for cooperation, shape and establish bodies for cooperation in the local self-government, have been prepared in order to implement cooperation and develop partnerships between the local self-government and civil society and their wider participation in planning and decision-making processes and their implementation.

Good practice examples are being implemented in the local self-government and they include topics of transparency and accountability in the local self-government and they are promoted for their scaling up to include other local self-government units. Training is delivered on transparent and accountable local self-government, and training on public ethics, in order to raise awareness of local self-government employees, and this process includes civil sector as well. E-government has been introduced in more developed local self-government units, while a number of local self-government units have published brochures and guides for citizens, as users of services, in relation to their rights and obligations in the local self-government, procedures, costs incurred by their requests in service provision, complaining procedures, etc. Guides on free access to information have also been published, websites of municipalities are updated more regularly, and citizens, civil sector and stakeholders in a community use them to obtain information about service provision, activities undertaken, decisions made, and they can also get answers to questions they asked, etc.

WHAT ELSE NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Although progress has been made, we cannot remain fully satisfied with the results achieved so far. Firstly, because the results achieved in relation to transparency and accountability vary in local self-government units, such as varying inclusion of citizens in the planning and decision-making processes in local communities. More efforts need to be invested in raising awareness in the local self-government and with citizens regarding importance of a transparent and accountable local self-government and its role as a service for citizens working in their interest. Awareness also needs to be raised about the fact that the money managed by the local self-government is the citizens' money and not local self-government's money, that it is used in the citizens' interest and for the development of the community. This is also very important for reducing corruption at local level. If local self-government employees have a highly developed awareness about transparency of work and about making decisions in the local self-government with full participation of citizens, they become more responsible for the contents of decisions and the quality of decisions made, and for their practical implementation. Including of citizens in the decision-making process and accepting their good ideas and initiatives contribute to the development of mutual trust and partnership between the local self-government and citizens and thus building of the role of the local self-government so that it becomes more accountable and more efficient in performing its work.

Therefore, the development and use of mechanisms for wider involvement of citizens in the decision-making process needs to continue, and acceptance of their ideas, suggestions and proposals when they contribute to making right and quality decisions in the local self-government, because this is the only way to eliminate ever present prejudice and lack of trust of citizens regarding opportunities and the way they affect work, planning and decision-making in the local self-government.

Also, education at all levels needs to continue through joint organization of training courses, with full involvement of the Union of Municipalities, which organizes various seminars and training programmes, in order to build transparency, accountability and efficiency of work of the local self-government. Local self-governments should continue to include representatives of civil society organisations in various working groups, commissions and councils, and this practice needs to be scaled up to include all local self-government units, in full compliance with the principle which says that priority in the procedure of selection of the representative of the civil society should be given to candidates with knowledge, skills and abilities to influence the creating of solutions and to contribute to the quality of decisions and to help their implementation as well.

The most important task of the local self-government certainly is to inform on and involve citizens in the local decision-making process by using various means and instruments for the purpose of better information (announcements in the municipal building and in public areas, through the Citizens' Bureau and information centre, web-site of the municipality, by sending mails and regular mails to individuals and organisations of the civil sector), and to accept their initiatives, proposals and suggestions.

The right of citizens to participate in government at local level is not the right that their local self-government or national government gives them as a gift, but it is their basic right on which the local self-government system is based. By participating in the process of political decision making, citizens guide actions of representative bodies or they assure political decisions independently, they decide on the quality of public services and their coverage, address individual problems in their area, influence the practicing of social, cultural, economic and all other individual and collective rights in the local self-government and its development. Therefore, the task of the local self-government is to contribute to making a citizen a politically active entity which assumes a part of the responsibility for decision-making in the local self-government.

This leads to the conclusion that transparency and accountability of both citizens and local self-government benefits local community in terms of achieving common interest. The next chapter provides international, regional and Montenegrin good practices related to improved accountability and transparency of local governments. They demonstrate successful cooperation between local governments and civil society and the success of citizen participation.

The most important task of the local self-government is to inform citizens on, and involve them in the local decision-making process

Best practices on transparency and accountability

To involve citizens in the decision making concerning the annual budget

Transparency and accountability have been recognized by local self-governments in Europe as key principles for creating a transparent environment at local level, which at the same time offer citizens broader participation in performing public affairs and making decisions in order to improve living in the community. Years ago, local self-governments used to find mechanisms and models for larger civil participation, which developed and became more efficient over time. Some of them became good practices in local self-government. This means that they improved civil activism, and addressed problems of some target groups. The good practices presented in this toolkit have been selected based on a several criteria:

Idea – every good practice represents an innovative approach in addressing a problem in a local self-government.

Objective – every good practice addresses a problem faced by a specific target group or was comprehensive in relation to local population.

Involving beneficiaries – good practices of transparency and accountability were achieved by municipalities which recognized the importance of involving the largest number of stakeholders in the process of implementing the idea.

Result – every good practice achieved measurable results in relation to target groups.

Sustainability – every good practice is still functioning within the local self-governments.

In addition to presenting and promoting the good practices, a short description of the projects is provided. Furthermore, a description of the process that led to their implementation –encouraging local self-governments to accept practices applied in the municipalities thereby improving living conditions of citizens – is provided. On the other hand, we hope that good practices will motivate local governments, citizens and NGOs to continue to actively find innovative approaches and encourage civil participation as a precondition for achieving transparency and accountability of local governments.

INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

Country: The Netherlands, Municipality of Oude IJsselstreek

Mechanism: Citizens forum

Purpose of the mechanism: To build new (and better) commitment with citizens, to make use of the creativity of society, to strengthen the social basis for decision making and to make the distance between local politics and society smaller.

Problem analysis: The Municipality of Oude IJsselstreek originated from 2 other municipalities in 2005. From the first moment the municipality invested a lot in building good relations with the population.

The new composition of the population and the fact that the initial municipalities had their own culture were special motives for paying attention to the relation between local government and its citizens. In several national projects Oude IJsselstreek was a good and sometimes outstanding practice (for example related to new forms of citizen participation). The citizens forum project is a serious effort to involve citizens in the decision making concerning the annual budget.

Process management: The municipality introduced a Citizens forum in the process of decision making for the 2011 annual budget. In order to involve all citizens, an attractively designed special newspaper was sent to all addresses in the municipality, containing clear information about the budget and the procedures foreseen.

Implementation: In the preparation of the decisions, the local board and the local council organized a 1-day meeting, randomly inviting 5000 people of over 18 years. 111 of them wanted to participate in the meeting. Members of the local assembly and members of the forum posed 35 questions about the 6 main themes of the budget (i.e. Neighbourhood and liveability policy, Social policy, Public facilities, Service-delivery, Sustainability, Taxes). Some days before the council made their final decisions the Citizens forum discussed the different questions in special groups. At the end of the day reports of the different groups were given to the plenary session of the forum. The forum gave an opinion by vote on the headlines and the most important budgetary decisions.

Evaluation and recommendations: An evaluation will be executed after the budget year 2011. The members of the Forum were very pleased with the opportunity to answer the questions and to discuss the budgetary proposals. Citizens showed their satisfaction with the special information paper about the budgetary proposals and the different procedures. The council-members make use of the results of the discussions of the Forum on a regular basis. The appreciation of the distribution of the special newspaper to all inhabitants is a reason to recommend this as a good instrument. An extra reason is the fact that other municipalities acknowledge the same method as very useful, see also the example of the municipality of Plevlja on page 34.

In general the Council of Almere has the objective to improve the relations with the inhabitants

Country: The Netherlands, Municipality of Almere

Mechanism: Citizens-panel for the City-council

Purpose of the mechanism: In general the Council of Almere has the objective to improve the relations with the inhabitants. More specific the Council has 4 main objectives for the citizens panel:

- To ask advice;
- To involve more citizens in political issues;
- To inform citizens about the work of the city council in general;
- To facilitate the commitment of citizens in the decision making of local government.

To find new ways to organize dialogue between citizens and politicians

Process management: The citizens panel has a double focus. It is not only an instrument enabling the municipality to learn about the opinions of its citizens. It mobilizes additional knowledge of active members of Almere's community, and it provides an alternative way to communicate with citizens about the work of the city council. Finally, it stimulates people to get acquainted with what is going on in the local government. The panel is not replacing the elected council, it should be regarded as a complementary element in local democracy. Instead of having elections every 4 years, citizens are given the opportunity to participate in local politics/local decision making more frequently. When becoming a member, the citizens have to fill a questionnaire. Based on these questions the citizen is defined with a certain type of citizenship. The system works with 4 different styles of citizenship, allowing the city council to see how different groups perceive different issues.

Implementation: In 2008 the City-council of Almere established an electronic citizen panel. Every citizens of Almere can become a member. The panel fits within the wish of the Almere City Council to find new ways to organize dialogue between citizens and politicians. Council-members can pose questions to the panel twice a month following to the agenda of the council. For the panel members it only costs 5 minutes to answer the questions through internet. Panel-members are adequately informed about the background of the subject and based on this information and their own ideas and preferences they answer the questions. All panel-members are invited by e-mail to participate when a new questionnaire is launched, no member is obliged to join. The panel has around three days to answer the questions. Most times the request is launched on Friday and the research closes on Monday-morning. The results are presented to the Council-members the following Thursday. A week later the Council decides about the subject. The results are presented at the website of the municipality, this includes an overview of the appreciation of results by the council members, and the way they are using the answers of the panel. In 2011 the panel had around 1930 active members.

Evaluation and recommendations – do's and don'ts: Since the start of the panel the City-council of Almere launched 23 issues to consult the panel, subjects varied from parking policy, budgets for neighbourhoods, the growth of the city in the coming 20 years etc. The panel grew from around 1700 (2009) members to around 1930 (2011). Between 40% and 70% percent of the panel-members joined the different research issues of the council. Some requests came from one or two political parties in the council, others came from several parties together.

Country: The Netherlands, Municipality of Leeuwarden

Mechanism: Review/examination of the city council through citizens inspection

Purpose of the mechanism: Main purpose of the examination by citizens was to give an advice about the work of the council.

Central question in the inspection research was how the work of the council could made more attractive and more comprehensible to citizens.

Problem analysis: The intention was that the commission should give a judgement about the way of debating, the way of presenting, the attractiveness of the council-meetings and the readability for citizens of documents drafted by the council. Hence, the commission needed to provide feedback on the way that the work of the city council is perceived by the “average” citizen.

Process management and implementation: In 2007 the municipality approached all citizens of Leeuwarden through a special newspaper that was distributed to all households in the municipality. In an interview, the Mayor of Leeuwarden explained the purposes of the project and invited citizens to participate in the work of the inspection-commission. 100 citizens applied for membership, 8 of them were selected by a committee consisting of members of the city-council and chaired by the Mayor. The citizens commission was composed of 4 women and 4 men. The youngest member was 24, the oldest 56. The commission could define their own working method, but received professional support of the staff of the secretary-general of the city-council. During the first months of its existence, the commission attended several meetings of the council and its advisory committees. After the first phase the commission studied the background of the work of the city-council. The commission interviewed the members that became a member of the council after the last elections in 2006. Next to this they spoke to members that entered the council during the 2002 – 2006 period, they spoke with the Mayor, some aldermen, and with the vice-president of the city-council. They sent a questionnaire to all council-members, followed council-members during working visit, visited a meeting between citizens and council members, interviewed citizens who attend the meetings of the city-council and asked representatives of NGO’s and municipal neighbourhoods about their experiences with the city-council. Finally, the commission visited 2 other city-councils and attended the meetings of the different political parties in the council.

*Provide feedback
on the way that
the work of the city
council is perceived
by citizens*

Evaluation and recommendations: The commission finished its activities in December 2007 and presented its final report in January 2008 with 47 recommendations. The report presents a broad range of ideas about improving the attractiveness of local politics. The report consisted of three parts giving focus to the evaluation and the core of the advice: 1. gathering and elaborating information, 2. the creation of opinions and a basic judgment and 3. the actual decision making. To highlight some of the most interesting recommendations:

- Information to citizens should be given at an early phase in the decision making process, hence before the start of the formal procedures;
- Council-committees must be better used as a momentum for the creation of opinions and awareness must be raised among citizens in order to enable them to prepare to influence decisions at the right moment;
- The decision making should be short (efficient) and clear – this is the actual responsibility of the City-council;
- Attention should be paid to informing and training the people that chair committee meetings and meetings with citizens;

- Be prepared in a proper way on the participation of citizens. Challenge them to be well equipped at the right moment.

REGIONAL BEST PRACTICES

Country: Bulgaria, Municipality of Pernik

Mechanism: Popularization and strategic use of e-governance service desk.

Purpose of the mechanism: To make the best of use of an established service-desk and to make a long-term strategy of e-governance and to enable citizens and servants to use it

Problem analysis: Pernik Municipality strived for unlimited access for the citizens to the administrative services offered, quicker distribution and circulation of documents, and hence to decrease corruption on more than one level. In order to achieve this, the municipality established a service desk. But, the desk wasn't operating optimally and the citizens weren't fully aware of its existence. There were several reasons for this inadequate supply of services:

*Unlimited access
for the citizens
to the municipal
services offered*

- The absence of a clear view of which services should be supplied to whom;
- The lack of information about the needs and background of the clients;
- The servants of Pernik who would work in the established desk lacked the necessary experience to do the job;
- The technology used in the desk was outdated which made the process inefficient;
- Pernik Municipality lacked the organisational capacity to manage the desk in an optimal way;
- The desk was not yet popular with the citizens and they were not fully aware of its existence.

Process management: The accessibility of the desk itself improved, as Pernik has developed its service desk in a very progressive way. The LOGO East project and the municipalities of Pardubice (Czech Republic) and Doetinchem (the Netherlands) supported this development by providing know-how and means for buying equipment. Trained personnel started using modern technology in providing both citizens and entrepreneurs with requested information or redirecting them to other sources.

Implementation:

- The municipality developed a clear and approved policy concerning the kind of service it wanted to deliver and the kind of information needed;
- The municipality adopted a strategic document called an "ISO Handbook" concerning some selected fields of policy. In this document, approved by the City Manager, the following is clearly described: the organisational structure, procedures and processes; types of relevant data, collected on a sustainable basis; data are properly processed and presented;

- Relevant hardware and software was purchased and made available for the service provision desk;
- Municipal staff was trained in communication skills for their work with citizens, representatives of organisations and entrepreneurs, as well as in the collection and interpretation of relevant information - more than 5 persons received training during the 3 international meetings;
- Campaigning to inform the public was done by making an annual journal, developed in close co-operation with the project partners. Furthermore various brochures have been made and are available for the citizens of Pernik.

The future of the municipal services looks good at the prospect of development of the help desk into an information centre, specifically facing business investments and entrepreneurship. The available information in the business sector will include a digitalized city plan, a list of properties on sale, property owners, size, neighbours, etc.

Evaluation and recommendations – do's and don'ts:

- Clearly define organizational structures, procedures and processes;
- Collect relevant data on a sustainable basis; elaborate the use of a guidebook with procedures and processes; ensure relevant software and hardware are available; describe and plan future activities;
- Provide trainings for the responsible civil servants;
- Open mannered actions;
- Learn from good practices and experiences in other countries.

Contact details: Municipality of Pernik – www.pernik.bg

Country: Serbia, Municipality of Bela Crkva

Mechanism: Creating sustainable management and citizen-friendly service desk

Purpose of the mechanism: To create tangible and sustainable change in serving citizens – not only a service desk as a physical place, but a friendly, inviting, transparent and accountable environment.

Problem analysis: The city hall of the municipality of Bela Crkva was an old building without front office where citizens didn't know where to go and who to approach for their needs and problems. There was no operating room, no internet access, no central heating, no computers for the majority of the employees, and no toilets for the citizens.

Also, there was no feedback regarding the citizens' problems, initiatives, and suggestions, even when they brought these in written form. The front office lacked the following four principles: fulfilling responsibilities, serving the citizens, satisfying the needs of its own staff and being economically efficient. The reason for this was the lack of a registration mechanism for this input and the absence of clear communication between employees, citizens, and local governance.

Introducing the dialogue among local government and businesses/NGOs

To conclude, the level of municipal service delivery and the structure of the municipal internal management was poor.

Process management: Through exchange of knowledge and experience with the Dutch partner municipality, the team work with different participants: citizens, NGOs, business sector. Also a new foundation for local development has been established by introducing the dialogue among local government and businesses/NGOs. The first steps are made towards an effective communication with the citizens and the citizens needs are taken care of. Finally, a sound communication and cooperation between the front and back office is established and this proves to function well. The need for encompassing and sustainable change in communication between local administration and citizens, business and NGO sector was met through “all-inclusive” actions: both infrastructure and capacity-building approach. Important thing was to motivate staff to be more open and efficient in dealing with citizens’ requests, and that was achieved through trainings and study visits, as well as through improving their working conditions. Staff became proud for working in the service desk and the overall atmosphere became more friendly and inviting for the citizens.

Implementation: The first activity was to reconstruct the city hall and to make a front office with public service desks. Furthermore, toilets for visitors were constructed, the entrance was improved and central heating was installed. Secondly, new hard and software was purchased and was put into place. Training in communication and computer skills were organised for the front office staff in the Netherlands, they also learned how to use the new software. In order to increase the communication between local stakeholders, and through this provide an incentive for local economic development, joint meetings with the Mayor, entrepreneurs, and NGOs were held. Furthermore, flyers and brochures were drafted and printed, informing the citizens about the envisaged changes and inviting the citizens to come to the city hall. The project made it possible for the municipality to become a more capable and professional organisation, and for the city hall to become a welcoming place with more efficient service provision for the citizens.

Evaluation and recommendations – do’s and don’ts:

- Stop ignoring the flaws in internal management and the requests of the citizens;
- The competence and involvement of the administrative staff is an important premise of a citizen-oriented service;
- Newly decorated building, and new hardware changed the mentality of the municipal staff, so the recommendation is – whenever possible, introduce a new structure to the organisation (i.e. new procedures, provide trainings to staff and invest in well-functioning hardware, improved working conditions for employees and facilities decoration);
- There can be no development and changes in a municipality without the participation of citizens.

Contact details: Municipality of Bela Crkva - <http://www.belacrkva.rs>

Country: Serbia, Municipality of Indjija

Mechanism: E-government System 48

Purpose of the mechanism: To make local public services more accessible and through this, improvement of transparency, accountability and efficacy of problem-solving. System 48 provides easy access and prompt reactions to citizens' complaints and requests in just 48 hours.

Problem analysis: In most municipal web sites, the main flow of information is one-way: from municipality to the citizens, and very seldom vice versa. In that way, municipal administrations could omit very relevant problems of the citizens, but still rest (undeservedly) assured that "they did the maximum in informing and transparency". Before System 48 was introduced, the citizens of Indjija were expected to come to the municipal building and submit their request in hard-copy. The main cause of the inefficiency in dealing with the requests of the citizens was due to the habit of sending the complaining citizen from one office to another. The long duration of request processing, because of poor mutual coordination of public companies, made matters even worse.

Process management: The municipality of Indjija already established an interactive web-site, with supporting IT service and team of IT staff, so the introduction of System 48 was added to the existing structure. The mayor, local administration, assembly and public companies have worked together in providing basic prerequisites for introducing this new service. The legal framework was provided, facilities were selected and new equipment was purchased. Several PR activities were done to inform citizens (flyers, local media, personal contact) about this new service. System 48 is available to citizens 24/7. The steps to use it are:

- Citizen reports the problem using their preferred way of communication: phone call, SMS or Internet;
- Central administrator receives the request, doing triage (by type of problem and/or geographic location) and forwarding the request to the public company or office in charge;
- In the shortest possible period, the relevant department assess the issue;
- Within 48 hours, the citizen receives feedback about the status of the problem solving procedure (online, via e-mail or mobile phone). Anonymous requests are also possible, they are dealt with but without feedback.

Implementation: In order to establish System 48, after initial training in Baltimore, USA, the municipality implemented the following activities:

- A Municipal Call Service was formed;
- Hardware and software were acquired, and some parts of software were developed by municipal software engineers;
- Sequential network with public companies was established;

*To make local
public services
more accessible*

The website facilitates investments and the use of municipal services

- Training of the administrators on contact with citizens, IT maintenance and weekly reporting was delivered. One central administrator was appointed, who receives the requests, doing selection and forwarding to company/office in charge. In each public company, one sub-administrator was selected to deal with citizens' requests that had been forwarded to them;
- Monitoring of System 48 functioning: once a week (every Friday), a meeting of administrators, head of IT service and the mayor is held. In this way, monitoring is done from the very top of the hierarchy (which gives the sense of importance), interventions are made timely, and the service is always under scrutiny – all this motivate employees for quality.

The system encompasses all public companies and municipal departments, because of this problem solving (or at least tackling the problem in the shortest possible period) is almost guaranteed to the citizens. This system was at the time of installing (2004) claimed to be unique in Europe, but in the meantime some dissemination was done as well, and a few other municipalities in Serbia and Macedonia introduced the same system with support of the IT staff of the municipality of Indjija.

Evaluation and recommendations – do's and don'ts:

- Do include various applications and tools to ensure interactivity of the web site;
- Make the use of these applications easy (i.e. add Frequently Asked Questions that citizens can select by ticking a box, but also allow space for those questions that do not fit into the offered categories to write their special problem);
- Connect all public service companies in a way that they can react in the shortest period of time to the requests submitted;
- Provide – through the website – easy access to all relevant statistic, budget, investment possibilities, urban planning, forms etc. in order to facilitate investments and the use of municipal services;
- Provide constant monitoring of service functioning on a high level (with involvement of the Mayor, if possible);
- Don't keep your information flow one-way, just "feed the public" with your success stories. It can lead to detachment and false impression that "you are doing great" but not really hearing citizens' opinions and requests, which can jeopardize citizens' trust in your administration.

Contact details: Municipality of Indjija – www.indjija.net

MONTENEGRIN BEST PRACTICES

Municipality: Pljevlja

Mechanism: Citizens bureau

Purpose of the mechanism: In order to achieve efficiency and transparency of work and encourage active participation of citizens in the decision-making process at local level, the municipality of Pljevlja established a Citizens Bureau within the local self-government in 2005.

A part of the funds for opening of the Citizens Bureau were provided from municipal budget, while significant support was provided by the Open Society Fund. The main objective of the establishment of this information-service station was to enable citizens to efficiently practice their rights and obligations in a single place, with respect for their personality and dignity. The project implementation created a modern staffing and technical conditions for an efficient procedure and a simpler procedure of addressing citizens' requests. In addition, communication between the local government and citizens improved significantly. Implementation of the project of the Citizens Bureau motivated citizens to participate actively in all segments of life and work, whether as initiators or clients who will be satisfied at all times with the services provided.

Problem analysis: A large number of local communities in the municipality of Pljevlja is rather far from the town which, in addition to inadequate transportation links, makes active participation of citizens in the development of local public policies significantly more difficult and minimizes the level of practicing of their rights related to local self-government. In addition, administrative procedures in the local self-government are sometimes unjustifiably long, and practicing of some rights requires visiting a large number of distant offices of local government bodies. This situation committed competent local government authorities to find the best way to enable citizens to practice their legally provided rights and fulfil their obligations in a single place. Low information level of citizens and their inability to influence the work of municipal services has often caused some activities to be implemented without their involvement and initiative in terms of their real needs.

Process management: The initiative for addressing the problem was presented by citizens and non-governmental organizations, and representatives of local communities as well, in communication with local government representatives. In those terms, initiators of the project organized a number of meetings with local government representatives before they reached an agreement on establishing the Citizens Bureau.

The process was initiated and managed by citizens as future beneficiaries of the project, which added value to the idea. The citizens got the opportunity to share the problems and obstacles they face and to fulfill their obligations towards the local self-government. Strong support was provided by non-governmental organizations through their experience in advocating ideas before local authorities. This completed the process of aligning opinions of citizens and competent local government bodies with regard to the need for establishing the Citizens Bureau.

Implementation: A necessary precondition for establishing and commissioning the Citizens Bureau was adaptation of space, i.e. provision of equipment and technical devices needed for the Bureau's operations. The start of the work required professional development of employees, both informing them about competencies of the local government bodies and office management, and the development of their computer skills. One of the initial tasks of the Bureau was to prepare forms for all types of requests under the competence of the local government authorities.

*To enable citizens
to efficiently
practice their
rights and
obligations in a
single place*

At the very beginning, leaflets and brochures were prepared and distributed to citizens in order to inform them better about competencies of the Bureau and their rights in general. As it continued operating, the Bureau became recognized for organizing seminars, public debates, round tables and other forms of discussions. Important assistance in the implementation was provided by the Ministry of Justice and by the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro through their professional advice and through involvement of their experts in certain activities.

Evaluation and recommendations – do's and don'ts: Implementation of this project strengthened the local self-government in Pljevlja in staffing, technical and spatial terms. The number of initiatives presented to local government authorities increased. Citizens are better informed about competencies of authorities through guidelines for citizens which can be found in the Citizens Bureau and through various forms of leaflets, brochures, information, etc. At the service stand, citizens can find prepared forms for filing all types of requests under the competence of the local government bodies. Citizens can also learn about the work of the Assembly as the highest-level citizen representative body by reviewing the Assembly's materials for every session. The establishment of the Citizens Bureau affected the organization of the local government since all the activities of notary office are concentrated in one place, among other things. The Citizens Bureau has increased substantially collection of local revenues generated by administrative and communal fees. What is the most important for citizens is that they do not need to wonder from one Secretariat or service to another any more, but they can get all information about the work of bodies and practice all their rights and obligations defined by the law in one place – the Citizens Bureau. The Citizens Bureau, in addition to being a service-information station for citizens, has grown into a Centre where all information about the local self-government bodies and their competences can be obtained in brochures, leaflets and in direct contact with staff.

Municipality: Bijelo Polje

Mechanism: Day-care centre for disabled children

Purpose of the mechanism: In order to ensure improved conditions for the quality of life of children with developmental difficulties, a day-care centre "Tisa" was established in the municipality Bijelo Polje in 2004. The Centre is a part of the unit that provides services to people with disabilities within the Social Work Centre. The main objective for establishing a day-care centre is to contribute to the inclusion of children with disabilities into everyday work of the community. The centre was created following the initiative of the Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities from Bijelo Polje, in cooperation with different stakeholders. The day-care centre Tisa is the first public service at local level in Montenegro with a sole focus for children with disabilities and its work is based on the principle of socialization, inclusion of children in the society and respecting of children's rights. The establishment of this Centre has provided a significant contribution to addressing problems of children with disabilities who could not have been included in any form of care. In addition, this project contributed to building accountability of local self-government bodies.

Problem analysis: There was a large number of people with disabilities who had not been involved in any form of educational or social activities. The position of these people, and particularly of children, in the community was not at a satisfactory level. People with disabilities often face prejudice from other citizens. In addition, these people often faced architectural barriers in practicing their rights, meaning that many buildings – such as schools, hospitals etc – are difficult to enter for disabled people and that many facilities are not adapted to disabled people (such as toilets, lack elevators etc). The lack of a multidisciplinary approach in working with these children was the cause of their exclusion from public life, because they were only cared for by their parents. Therefore, families of children with disabilities were not able to equally participate in everyday social events. Beside children with disabilities, a particularly vulnerable category were often their mothers who, due to everyday care for children, could not find employment and contribute to the improvement of the economic position of their families. Therefore, a large number of these families was often in a difficult economic position. An additional problem was imposed by insufficient information provided to the population about problems and needs of the disabled persons which always led to their low sensibility.

Process management: The initiative for establishing the Day Care Centre came from the Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities from Bijelo Polje. In order to establish the Centre, the Association established intensive communication with representatives of the municipality of Bijelo Polje, Social Work Centre, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities of Montenegro. During the process, the Association was strongly supported by three international agencies, UNICEF, HI and GGS.

The establishment of such a service for children with disabilities at the municipal level required team work in implementing the idea. For this reason, the Association provided a multi-sector team comprising representatives of the before mentioned institutions which eventually implemented the project.

Implementation: To ensure efficient project management, a coordination body comprising representatives of all project partners was established at the very beginning. For the Day Care Centre a multidisciplinary team for working with children with disabilities was established involving a psychologist, a physical therapist, a speech therapist, a pedagogue and a nurse. The Centre's rooms have been provided by the municipality and have been fully equipped. Activities of the Centre imply the provision of services to children with disabilities between the age of 3 to 18. Experienced and professional individuals work with the children. Beside everyday activities with children and parents that are being undertaken in the centre, food and transportation in accessible vehicles is provided to their homes. Parents can also use psychological support provided by the Centre.

Evaluation and recommendations – do's and don'ts: The results achieved so far by the Day Care Centre "Tisa" are mainly related to: a comprehensive approach to social care, inclusion and integration of disabled children into the community, encouraging disabled children's independence in everyday life, protection of basic rights of these children and the provision of support to the children during specific rehabilitation.

Ensure improved conditions for the quality of life of children with disabilities

Improving the level of satisfaction of citizens with municipal service provision

Attitude of society towards people with disabilities has changed; there is less prejudice and less stereotypes, which contribute to an improved quality of the life of families. Parents note significant progress in children's behaviour. Also, housing children in the Day Care Centre opened better opportunities for employment of parents and, indirectly, an improved economic position of these families.

Municipality: Bar

Mechanism: E-governance

Purpose of the mechanism: In order to ensure the activities of local government bodies become quicker, more efficient and more transparent, E governance, i.e. an integrated information system was established in the municipality of Bar. The creation and commissioning of the portal was arranged by the municipality. This system is primarily aimed at providing information to citizens who can learn about the most recent developments in the work of the local self-government through the web-site, and the citizens are able to check the status of their individual cases and requests separately as well. The establishment of E-governance is aimed at improving the level of satisfaction of citizens with the service provision of the local self-government and, in general, with the way the local self-government addresses their needs and rights. A special value of this practice is its adjustment to modern forms of communication and overcoming of traditional forms which do not meet citizens' needs appropriately. As of June 2009, when the E-governance started to be fully implemented, all activities of the municipality of Bar have been covered and an easy and quick overview and control of activities of the local self-government bodies has been provided.

Problem analysis: The municipality of Bar faced low efficiency and transparency of work for a long time. Due to the lack of a modern information system which would make the majority of information about the government's work available, citizens and non-governmental organizations complained about the transparency of work of the local government bodies. Citizens mainly complained about the inaccurate addressing of their requirements and insufficient transparency of procedures. Traditional forms of communication do not meet the new needs of citizens. These needs are related to changes in the society in general, i.e. the increasing use of information technologies by citizens. In addition to citizens, problems were noted by employees of the municipality as well. This especially relates to situations where one issue was processed by several employees. Having in mind that issues consider lots of paper, they have been often missing or lost in premises of these employees.

Process management: The initiative for establishing E-government was presented by the Mayor of Bar. Given the complexity of the work, expert teams were formed at the very beginning. Teams of experts (lawyers, IT experts etc) were responsible for supervising the process of establishing E-government from launching the tender, implementation to the handover of the system.

Target groups, both citizens and employees, were involved in the initial phase of the process which included the mapping of the problem in practicing citizens' rights caused by a lack of a modern web portal and by obligations of employees as well.

Implementation: The e-government project, the good practice respectively, was implemented in two phases: 1) procurement of computer equipment and configuration of IT infrastructure and 2) software development. In June 2009, the first version of the application was added to the municipal server and the training of employees and testing of the application started. E-government implies the processing of cases in electronic format only. All received cases are scanned in the notary's office, and further processing is performed only electronically. The status of cases and activities which are undertaken in their processing can be checked at all times.

Evaluation and recommendations – do's and don'ts: Both citizens and employees of the municipality of Bar benefit from this project. The system allows beneficiaries to obtain information on the status of every case at any time on the web portal of the municipality of Bar and enables them to submit requests for obtaining certificates and various documents that the municipality is responsible for by e-mail or by filling a web form and to choose how they want to collect it, to report on communal problems, etc. Introduction of E-government provided the opportunity to the municipal management to obtain information on the status of all cases, whether finalized or in the process, in a simple and quick manner.

Furthermore it provides the possibility to obtain information on performance of their employees individually, and for the entire department/unit/secretariat. In addition, E-government provides for the development of various databases and the easy keeping of records such as registers of tax and other payers; monitoring collection of taxes; integrated management and overview of public procurements, records of the time employees spend in their work places (electronic system of control of arrivals and departures from work), keeping registers of human resources, etc.

Both citizens and employees of the municipality of Bar benefit

Municipality: Bijelo Polje

Mechanism: Youth and development office

Purpose of the mechanism: In order to ensure conditions for the quality of life of youngsters that attend school, work and live in Bijelo Polje, and in order to reduce the youth unemployment rate, the municipality of Bijelo Polje established the Youth and Development Office. The main objective for the establishment of the Office was – on the one hand – to implement youth policy and propose measures for the improvement of the policy, and - on the other hand – to learn about problems of youth as a target group whose interests are protected by the Office through participating in all public events of general interest. Through the office, young people can obtain all information they need in one place and they can get help in acquiring knowledge and skills which will help them to find employment. The Office is also a space where young people can spend their time more creatively.

*Young people
can obtain all
information they
need in one place*

Establishment of the Office encourages young people to participate in public life through the Office and they are stimulated to find solutions to their problems.

Problem analysis: Due to youth unemployment, which is a high percentage of the total unemployment in the municipality, and due to the lack of financial resources, a large number of young people is not interested in participating in public life. Lack of interest is largely a consequence of insufficient possibilities both initiated by and for young people. A consequence of such a situation may be that young people turn to inappropriate behaviour and addiction as a potential solution to their dissatisfaction. In addition, it is obvious that young and creative people who would invest new energy and ideas in improving the implementation of activities of general interest are not sufficiently represented in the local self-government. Furthermore, existing municipal staff is not really interested in finding solutions to problems of the young population.

Process management: The initiative for addressing problems related to youth (unemployment) was presented by the local self-government, following a proposal put forward by young people from the municipality, in cooperation with the non-governmental organization “Youth Centre Proactive” and the OSCE mission to Montenegro. These parties worked together on the drafting of the Local Action Plan for Youth. Logistic support to the project implementation was provided by “Proactive” which acted as a contact point between the municipality of Bijelo Polje and the OSCE Mission to Montenegro.

Implementation: The Project of the Youth and Development Office implied the establishment of a new organizational unit within the municipal Centre for Information System. The conditions for the start of the work were created by the procurement of equipment for the premises, by the definition of activities to be undertaken by the Office and by the financial support provided by the American Embassy. Representatives of this Office participate in working groups, stakeholder groups, tribunes, round tables and thus participate in public life and are aware of all developments in the local self-government.

Evaluation and recommendations – do’s and don’ts: Implementation of this project provided the municipality of Bijelo Polje with the Office which changed the environment of the youth in Bijelo Polje. The existence of the Office encouraged young people to believe in the project “Bijelo Polje, the town of young people”. Also, it contributed to convincing youngsters that they are cared for and improved their motivation to stay and study in Bijelo Polje, and to start their families there. The Office succeeded in motivating young people to contact them in order to obtain useful information without having to waste time seeking for such information from counter to counter. The Office paid special attention to finding opportunities for young people to acquire special knowledge and skills which helps them finding employment. The Youth and Development Office implements youth development policy and programmes, proposes measures for their improvement, participates in development of youth policy, local action plans and municipal regulations related to education, employment, participation of youth in social life, health care etc.

Results of the survey of citizens of Bijelo Polje that was conducted by the Office show that more than 80% of citizens thinks positively about the establishment of the Office and pointed out that it was an additional motivation for young people and their participation in the local community.

Municipality: Tivat

Mechanism: Empty chair procedure for NGO representatives in local parliament

Purpose of the mechanism: In order to ensure broader participation of NGOs in decision-making processes at local level, the municipality of Tivat adopted changes and amendments to the Code of Conduct of the Assembly, which set out details of procedures for NGOs' participation in the work of the local Parliament and regulates opportunities for participation of a larger number of NGOs in a single session. The mechanism that enables their presence in the local parliament session is called "empty" chair, and considers their participation and opportunity to speak about topics that are on the agenda, without voting right. This project was implemented by the municipality of Tivat following the initiative of the Centre for Development of Non Governmental Organizations (CRNVO).

The main objective of this project relates to higher participation of NGOs in decision-making processes in order to improve the quality of decisions and other documents adopted by the local Parliament. The setting of clear criteria for participation in the work of the local Parliament, the use of the "empty chair", and the defining of the participative procedure are aimed at building the professionalism of representatives of civil society on the one hand, and accountability of local self-government on the other hand. The implementation of the project in the municipality of Tivat contributed to an increased number of NGOs that participate in the decision-making processes. Consequently, capacities of the non-governmental sector were indirectly strengthened in the municipality. Local self-government has largely benefited from the efficient functioning of the "empty chair" procedure since suggestions, proposals and comments of NGOs for some decisions and regulations largely influenced the quality of these documents. Because the NGOs represent and protect the interests and opinions of citizens, the empty chair procedure strengthens relations between local self-government bodies and MPs with citizens in the community.

Problem analysis: Before changes and amendments were made to the Code of Conduct of the Assembly in the municipality of Tivat and before the "empty chair" institute was introduced, a very small number of NGOs showed interest in participating in the local decision-making processes. According to the Code at that time, only a certain number of NGOs could participate in the work of the Assembly. It is well-known that NGOs address specific problems and one representative may talk about one or maximum two items of the agenda. This used to cause problems within the sector because it was not that easy to identify one civil society representative when there were several 'NGO-themes' on the agenda (for example, social policy, ecology or reform of public administration).

Enable participation of a larger number of NGOs during assembly sessions

Consequently, the use of the empty chair procedure as at a very low level. This caused a large dissatisfaction of non-governmental organizations and citizens in general. The non-governmental sector was thus prevented from having their proposals heard in the local Assembly, which was a very negative development since the NGO sector has as a key value and advantage that they are very well aware of problems of specific target groups such as people with disabilities, victims of violence, youth, pensioners and others. Hence, the problem was two-fold: on the one hand the NGO sector showed a reluctance to participate in the work of the local Parliament and in local documents in general, and on the other hand, the local self-government did not present any initiatives to find a solution and motivate and encourage NGOs to contribute to the quality of local public policies.

Process management: The initiative for the establishment of the project was presented by the municipality of Tivat following the proposal of the CRNVO. CRNVO proposed amendments to the Code of the Assembly which elaborate details of clear criteria for selecting a representative NGO for using the “empty chair” institute and to enable the participation of a larger number of NGOs in a single session. This proposal or amendments were welcomed by all structures in the municipality: Mayor, President of the Assembly, and MP who eventually voted in favour of these changes to the Code. This practice aimed at strengthening the cooperation between NGOs and local self-government, which established a partnership approach that was a key precondition for creating a solid solution.

Implementation: While working on changes and amendments to the Code, and more specifically on integrating CRNVO’s proposed text of the Code, the Mayor organized a meeting with representatives of the NGOs. The objective of the meeting was to inform NGO representatives about the intention to make changes to regulate their participation in the work of the Assembly and to inform them about specific proposal of the CRNVO. The NGO representatives welcomed the proposal of CRNVO. The activity implied making changes to the Code which established an obligation of inviting NGO representatives to the assembly sessions, giving them the right to present their proposals, suggestions and opinions during the sessions with regard to the agenda items. The changes to the code created clear criteria to be fulfilled by NGOs whose representatives may use the procedure of an “empty chair”. Examples of these criteria for CSOs are: to be registered for minimum one year; to have their head office in Tivat; and to have implemented a € 5000 worth project. The changes to the Code were adopted in 2008.

Evaluation and recommendations – do’s and don’ts: The implementation of the project primarily motivated NGO representatives to take part in the work of the local Parliament and to participate in local decision-making processes. After the changes and amendments to the Code were adopted and the procedure of the “empty chair” was regulated, every sessions has 3-4 NGO representatives participating. NGOs are very active in presenting their proposals and suggestions in relation to local documents and contribute to the quality of these documents. Depending on their competencies and interests, NGO representatives participate in the work of the local parliament by individual topics on the agenda.

NGOs represent opinions and interests of citizens and, thus, by having the NGOs participating the trust of citizens in the local self-government is indirectly strengthened, the same is true for citizens "ownership" of decisions adopted by the Assembly. NGO representatives take turns between sessions which ultimately results in improved capacities of the NGOs, learning about decision-making methods and procedures, stronger accountability for the implementation of decisions at local level, etc.

Municipality: Danilovgrad

Mechanism: Improving business development in the municipality

Purpose of the mechanism: In order to encourage an excitant business environment and to improve economic development of the community in particular, the municipality started removing certain business barriers. The main objective of the project was to improve the business environment in the municipality by creating conditions for efficient implementation of business ideas and to improve cooperation with investors. Establishing conditions for implementation of a number of business ideas and attracting large national and international investors is a precondition for a higher employment rate of the municipality, which will in turn lead to higher standards. The implementation of the project contributed to a larger number of investments in the municipality and to a lower emigration of citizens from the town. Consequently, conditions of living in the community have improved, which offers increased opportunities to all citizens, especially in the field of employment.

Problem analysis: Key motif for removing the business barriers resulted from the need to overcome an unfavourable environment for business development in the municipality. There were many problems: lack of legal framework to motivate businessmen and investors to invest and implement their business ideas, lack of quality of spatial planning documents and complicated administrative procedures. The municipality was faced with the closing of a number of companies on the one hand, and very low private investments and few investors who were willing to encourage development on the other hand. Unfortunately, this situation affected citizens as well as it became increasingly difficult for them to find employment. This increased the emigration rate of the citizens and quality staff to other local self-governments. The business environment in the municipality of Danilovgrad was not competitive compared to its immediate surroundings.

Process management: The initiative for the implementation of the project was presented by the municipality of Danilovgrad. The process was mainly managed by the Mayor, and included citizens in different phases as end users and businessmen as the most important partners in the implementation of the idea. The Mayor met regularly with the target groups and during these meetings key problems were identified related to the development of a sound business environment in the municipality. Furthermore, specific measures for improvement were proposed. The process implied a detailed analysis of strategic and developmental documents of the municipality of Danilovgrad.

Framework and conditions for development of entrepreneurship were improved

Implementation: A precondition for the implementation of the project was the adoption of planning documents in the municipality. Reason for this is that business barriers mostly relate to the investors and private sector in general, whose businesses are directly linked and depend on the planning documents in the municipality. The activity resulted in the adoption of a Spatial Plan for municipal development until 2020 and some other planning documents needed for removing business barriers. This was followed by the implementation of a number of incentive measures for business sector, particularly for establishing and launching businesses. These measures include: exemption from paying company taxes during the first twelve months after establishment of a new company; tax benefits for newly-employed; payment of communal bills in instalments; and incentive measures for the development of agriculture and rural areas. Efficient administration was lacking in the establishment of a quality framework for encouraging business development in the municipality, for this reason the municipality implemented the principle of efficient implementation, particularly in relation to investors. This implied to take decisions for applications for obtaining construction permits in the shortest period possible, and to establish data bases for tax payers, and on municipal land and General Urban Plans.

Evaluation and recommendations – do's and don'ts: Implementation of the project in the municipality of Danilovgrad improved the framework and conditions for development of entrepreneurship. The implementation of incentive measures, i.e. exemption from payment of certain levies or their programmed payment and to increase the efficiency of the municipal administration helped launching businesses in the most critical period for new companies (i.e. first year). On the other hand, a solid communication and cooperation with business sector was established, based on mutual interest. Beneficiaries of this project are international entrepreneurs and large foreign investors who launch their businesses in stimulating conditions, resulting in significant savings in time and money. Also, the working population benefits from the project since they are offered better employment opportunities.

Municipality: Herceg Novi

Mechanism: Partnership as a way to plan the town

Purpose of the mechanism: In order to plan the centre of the town with the surroundings and to create a more pleasant environment for both the local population and tourists in the municipality of Herceg Novi, a project was implemented: Partnership as a way to plan the town. The main objective of the project was to engage citizens in the process of deciding on how the front of urban buildings in the centre of town look like and to engage them in visual communication. The project was implemented by the Agency for Building and Development of Herceg Novi from its own budget. The implementation of the project improved urban, cultural and tourism potentials of the municipality which are used by all citizens and visitors of the municipality.

Problem analysis: While individual municipality decisions are in place with regard to spatial planning in the municipality of Herceg Novi, the process of developing new appearance of the centre of the town took a long time. Reason for this was that the existing local documentation regulating the restructuring of the municipality has not been implemented in an efficient way. Avoiding to address this problem led to a decrease in the interest of direct target groups, such as owners of buildings, users of business premises and public areas, to contribute to the improvement of the appearance of this part of the town. In addition to these groups, citizens of the municipality also expressed their dissatisfaction with the appearance of the centre of the town and its surroundings, but they did not initiate any specific actions to address the problem either. Besides, repressive actions of inspection services only made the existing situation worse.

Process management: The initiative for the implementation of the project was launched by the Agency for Building and Development. The Agency managed a solid participatory process that engaged citizens in the analysis of the problem and in the preparation of specific proposals for the planning of the town.

A very important characteristic of the process was that no individual solution for implementation of the project could have been adopted without final approval from a citizen (owner of a building, user...) or be rejected without explanation. As process manager, the Agency established efficient cooperation with other stakeholders. More specifically, the Agency worked with communal inspection services and assured the implementation of activities on behalf of the citizens for the Secretariat for Urbanism.

Implementation: To ensure the efficient implementation of the project, the Agency produced an Action Plan at the very beginning of the project related to the planning of the sight of the front of buildings, urban equipment and visual communications in the centre of town and its immediate surroundings. The project was implemented in 3 phases:

- The first phase implied creating a partnership with citizens in order to analyze the current situation and to define proposals for improvements;
- The second phase implied the specific formulation of the project "Urban Street Furniture and Visual Communications for Western Suburb of Herceg Novi". Within this phase citizens were given an opportunity to learn about the project and to provide suggestions regarding the document;
- The final phase related to the provision of support to beneficiaries in identifying and selecting contractors. The Agency continuously supervised works related to facades and other buildings identified for reconstruction. The Agency confirmed the principle of partnership as the key on which the project is based, not only in the preparatory phase but in the final phase as well, and is thus the added value to the implementation of the project. Specifically, the Agency chose the NGO "Expedition" – Centre for Sustainable Spatial Development from Kotor to be its partner in the preparation of works on the reconstruction of the centre of town and its surroundings.

A solid participatory process that engaged citizens in the analysis of the problem and in the preparation of specific proposals for the planning of the town

Evaluation and recommendations – do's and don'ts: Beneficiaries of the services expressed satisfaction with the approach of addressing problems expecting a high level of public participation in the process. Important point in the process of preparation and implementation of the Action Plan is the fact that the Agency became a part of the local self-government so public interests are protected by an Agency that can be trusted. The Action Plan provided good results. Municipal decisions related to the planning of the town have finally been implemented in practice. The centre of town is now organized, a balance has been established between urban equipment and various users of public areas, most front sides of buildings have been renovated, visual communications are uniform and appropriate for attractive appearance of the town.

Municipality: Tivat

Mechanism: Improve living conditions for Rea children

Purpose of the mechanism: In order to improve living conditions for children of Egyptian descent, the municipality of Tivat implemented a project called: "Help for children of Egyptian population". The project was implemented by the Secretariat for Economy and General Administration in cooperation with the NGO "Association of Egyptians". The main objective of the project was to help children who are about to start going to school and to assist students who regularly attend higher grades of elementary school by providing them with clothes, school equipment and free bus transport. The project was aimed at encouraging participation of the Egyptian population in regular educational system. The implementation of the project increased the number of Egyptian children enrolled in elementary school, but indirectly it contributed to better socialization of these children and to removing prejudice about them as well.

Problem analysis: The Egyptian population in Tivat faces many problems in their everyday life. There are prejudices in the community related to this group of citizens which often complicate their daily communication and cooperation with other citizens or organisations in the community. This might constrain them from practicing their basic rights. Another problem is that Egyptians in the municipality of Tivat have the status of internally displaced persons. Most of them are accommodated in pre-fabricated structures with limited living conditions, and this population often faces existential problems. Due to permanent concerns for elementary existential conditions, parents pay little attention to the education of their children. Additional reason for this is that in most cases the parents are illiterate themselves. Even in cases when children start attending elementary school, education is very often terminated in early phases because parents direct their children towards various other activities aimed at earning money for the living.

Process management: The initiative for the implementation of the project was launched by the Secretariat for Economy and General Administration in cooperation with NGO “Association of Egyptians” and Elementary School “Drago Milović” from Tivat. This partnership defines priorities in helping children. The Association provided information about specific needs of families which make education of the children difficult. Having reviewed the needs analysis, the Secretariat focused its assistance on the key needs that were expressed during the analysis. The grounds for the process were provided by the section of the draft Local Action Plan for Children, that defined a strategic orientation of the municipality towards higher participation of children of RAE population, more specifically Egyptians, in the educational system.

Implementation: A precondition for providing help was information about the number of children that belong to the Egyptian population. This information was provided by the Association of Egyptians. Once the data were collected about children enrolled in the first grade and children who attend school regularly, certificates were issued on their names to allow them to buy clothes worth €70 and school material worth €30. Free bus transport from school to home was provided for nine students based on the agreement with the bus operator that the municipality would fully cover the costs. Furthermore, communication was established with the Bureau for Education and Rehabilitation of People with Hearing and Speech disabilities in Kotor regarding the integration of four deaf-mute children into education process. The Secretariat provided the necessary assistance in obtaining the required documentation for individuals of the population in social need to allow them to participate in the tendering process to obtain social housing.

Evaluation and recommendations – do’s and don’ts: The project “Help for Children of RAE Population” contributed to the process of integration and socialization of these children. There is an obvious increase in the number of children of the Egyptian population in the educational process. The project has contributed to the awareness of this population that they are not entirely neglected by the local community they. The project also contributed to weaken the prejudice of the local population regarding the citizens from Egyptian descent.

*The project
contributed to
the process of
integration and
socialization of Rea
children*

Conclusions and recommendations

This toolkit has been made to support the Montenegrin local governments in improving transparency and accountability in their daily work. This actually means: working on strengthening of local democracy. This is a serious job asking for patience, a lot of energy and isn't easy. Politicians, officials, public servants and citizens at the local and national level should be aware of this. Based on the previous chapters one can say that the most important conclusion of this toolkit is to underline the importance of an open relation between local government, civil society and citizens. This final chapter provides some other conclusions and recommendations to the readers of the toolkit in order to memorise the most important findings related to improving accountability and transparency in local governments.

Working on strengthening of local democracy

- Stimulating the participation of citizens in different stages of public decision-making is an important condition for building trust and it guarantees an open relation between government and citizens. Participation can take different forms and can be established through different steps: informing, consulting, advising, cooperation (co-production) and (co-)determination. It is important to be clear from the beginning about what is expected from citizens in terms of participation and about what the local government offers them. Clear information and clear procedures are key words in this discourse;
- Local assemblies and the local publication administration should practice accountability in an active way. Inform citizens about public budgets, raise public awareness on the fact that money raised by taxes should be managed carefully. Encounters between voters and elected representatives should not be limited to elections. The principle of "No taxation without representation" demands active accountability of both elected officials and public servants as well;
- Spend time on the quality of public service delivery: adequate prices, clear information about procedures, equal treatment for all citizens. A satisfactory judgement of citizens and business-men on public service-delivery (waste management, public lighting, building permits, adequate registration of the population etc.) at the local level is an important stimulus for a trustful position of local government;
- E-government is a new challenge and offers opportunities to invest in new relations between citizens, civil society, businesses and local government. It can also foster the efforts of accountability and transparency. It shortens the time spend on procedures and provides citizens with the option to check the treatment of their own cases (formal requests). An important side note is to remember that there are citizens without (stable) access to internet (especially elderly people and citizens in rural areas). These citizens should not be forgotten and can be well informed by more traditional means (for a good example see the municipality of Pljevlja);

- Communication with the community (citizens, companies, NGO's) is made possible by making use of the media. Meaning to include contacts with the media in the daily working routine so that it becomes part of everyday activities. A public affairs agenda can be an instrument of a public administration that keeps up high principles of accountability and transparency to strengthen democracy as basic need to develop the community together with citizens (see lessons learned in chapter 3).

SOME FINAL WORDS TO THE READERS

Working on accountability and transparency is not a political issue in terms of ideology. The democratic system needs attention from all politicians, citizens and civil society organisations. When these three groups establish a sound communication and cooperation, a transparent, accountable and democratic society will be the result. We hope the examples provided on the previous pages inspire you to pay attention to improving accountability and transparency in your municipality as well!



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