



United Nations  
ALBANIA



# The Future We Want

## COUNTRY REPORT

Second phase of Post-2015  
Development Agenda Consultations





COVER DESIGN AND LAYOUT  
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# Country Report

Second phase of Post-2015 Development Agenda Consultations

Transparency, Awareness and Responsiveness

*“Voices from Albania”*

Tirana, July 21, 2014



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## List of Acronyms Used

CBS	Community Based Scorecard
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CRU	Child Rights Units
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DSAC	Department of Social Assistance and Care
EC	European Commission
EUD	European Union Delegation
FP	Focal Point
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGU	Local Government Unit
MoSWY	Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
NE	Ndihma Ekonomike (economic aid)
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
RC	Regional Council
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations for Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations For Population
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VoT	Victims of Trafficking
WB	World Bank

# Acknowledgments

UN would like to thank the representatives of local units in the regions of Shkodra, Lezha, Vlora, Fieri and Elbasan, Durres and Tirana for their support in the organization of consultations.

We are very grateful to all the participants in the consultations and the key stakeholders we have met during the drafting of this report. This document is a product primarily based on their perceptions, opinions and recommendations for the future of the development agenda in the country. Without their commitment, articulation and serious thinking for the future, this work would not have been complete. They shared generously their time and experienced insights that enriched our understanding on the governance challenges in Albania, relevant actors and key messages that need to be conveyed for the future of the development agenda.

Special thanks go to the Child Rights Observatory, a local NGO, for the very timely and professional support in facilitating the organization of consultations in all selected regions.

Lastly, thank you to the UN Agencies involved with the consultations, in particular UNICEF, IOM, and UN Women for leading the process in close cooperation with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office as well as UNFPA for its support and active engagement throughout the process.

# 1. Executive Summary

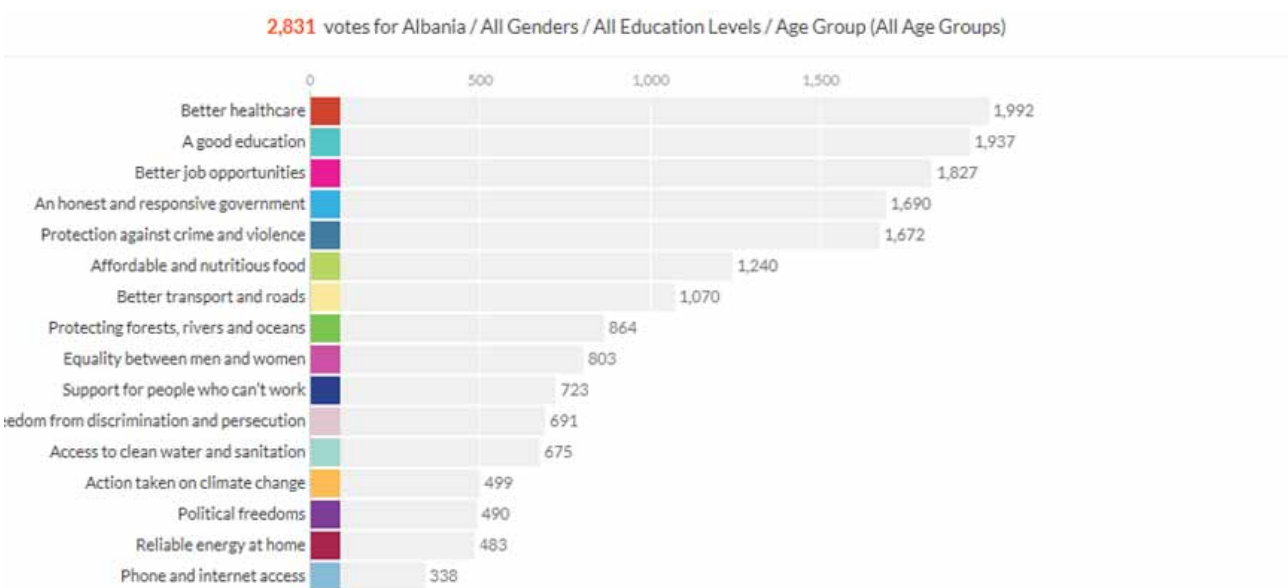
The United Nations has started one of the largest processes of worldwide consultations to feed the Development Agenda after the completion of Millennium Development Goals in 2015. This unprecedented consultation targets policymakers, academics, experts, civil society organisations and interested citizens.

Albania has already completed its first consultation round on the theme “Future We Want” during which participants converged that better access to services at both national and local levels is fundamental. More than 5,000 Albanians actively participated in the consultations around the following topics: social inequalities, youth employment, and environmental sustainability. Participation and cooperation between the citizens and the state institutions was considered a crucial aspect in ensuring a qualitative and efficient governance process. Youth participants had a strong say in these consultations (Young people under 25 represented 65% of the total).

Over the past two decades in Albania, much of the governance agenda was focused on building institutions that are capable and responsive to citizens, and which can in turn develop and implement policies for protecting human rights, deepen democracy and establish a functioning economy. However, citizen engagement in influencing policies and holding officials accountable is considered to be low in Albania and a general sense of apathy is often reported in this respect. Most of the programmes at different levels (especially at local level) have not succeeded to recognize the potential of citizens’ involvement in shaping the governance outcomes.

One of the most recognised contributions of the Millennium Development Goals was that they served as a unifying global paradigm for human development for over a decade. The post-2015 agenda aims to build on the strongest features of this instrument in order to revitalize the global development agenda.

In this context, the global initiative to support participatory monitoring for accountability as a central feature of the new development agenda was considered an important theme to convene the national dialogues in the second phase of the consultations. Furthermore, around 60% of the Albanians (2831 votes from Albania) that participated in My World survey, voted for an honest and responsive government.



My WorldSurvey results-Albania (<http://data.myworld2015.org/?country=Albania>)



Consultations that took place during the months of June – July 2014, served to frame the views of stakeholders on transparency, accountability and readiness of the governance processes to serve citizens. *The objective was to collect and articulate the citizen's voices on the main issues that the development agenda should focus on in the coming years.*

The consultations were expected to help in showcasing how more a accountable, transparent, and responsive governance is being pursued at the national and local level, using either institutional or non-governmental participatory monitoring mechanisms/tools. In addition, they explored how participation and empowerment can improve accountability in the Post-2015 development agenda.

About 350 participants were consulted in the selected towns of Durres, Shkodra, Elbasan, Fier, Vlora, Lezha and Tirana. The main groups were: representatives from local government (about 30% of participants), civil society organisations (30% of participants), and community members (about 40%). They were partners of UN agencies in the field, active actors as well as direct beneficiaries. Attention was paid to the demographics of consultations in terms of equal representation of women, adequate presence of young people as well as as vulnerable groups.

In terms of transparency the questions revolved around access to information in terms of policy making and implementation at both central and local levels. Discussions focused largely on whether citizens are duly informed about their rights and obligations of public institutions to enforce these rights. Anchored around the national legislation and strategic framework on social inclusion but also on more tangible processes such as local budgeting, consultations focused on the available instruments of participation at the local level and their use. Openly geared toward real life examples, practical discussions took place on the quality of public services at the local level and the potential to improve.

In terms of accountability, consultations focused on the roles and responsibilities of public officials – their motivation, information sharing and enabling systemic set up to ensure a two way communication with the beneficiaries. The participants' views were collected with regard to the available channels for ensuring accountability towards citizens and the monitoring mechanisms for policies and services at both central and local levels. Particular attention was paid to the vertical and horizontal communications for public service delivery.

Some of the concerns raised by the participants in the consultation which require more attention in the future addressed the poor transparency of government, the politicized administration where meritocracy is weak, and proper performance evaluation of public officials, in particular at local level. Information dissemination on services, rights, public hearings, consultation processes and all public information from all governance levels needs further considerations so that all groups can have equal and timely access to it. Particular attention needs to be given to vulnerable groups, as it was already mentioned by the participants "the ones lacking information are actually also the ones needing it the most". Participants also stressed that accountability and responsiveness can only be improved through a sound monitoring mechanism.

Serious efforts are needed in order to improve the information sharing between local actors and data accuracy. Not all of the currently used indicators properly display the dimensions of a problem. So far, lack of timely and accurate data has been hindering the drafting and implementing of policies at all levels in the country.

The clarification of roles and responsibilities of all actors, in particular at local level, as well as the performance management of public officials were also pointed out as requiring more attention in the future. Setting clear and measurable indicators as well as linking objectives with budgets where some of recommendations for improving the policy process in Albania. Strengthening the role of civil society organizations in service provision as partners and also to ensuring accountable public institutions, needs to be highlighted in the

future development agenda.

Finally, the participants concluded that government at all levels should be committed to citizen involvement in decision-making and should institutionalize mechanisms for mutual accountability while instilling a culture of genuine participation and citizen engagement.

This consultation process also linked to the global process of International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 review (ICPD beyond 2014), specifically sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, adolescents and youth needs and rights, and non-discrimination as critical elements to the post-2015 Development Agenda process. The aspiration of the development agenda beyond 2015 is to create a just and prosperous world, where all people realize their rights and live with dignity and hope. Eradicating poverty in all its forms, tackling exclusion and inequality, and empowering women and girls are instrumental in bringing this vision to life. Consistent with a human rights-based approach and poor people's perspectives, UNFPA in Albania also joined the process of consultations and contributed to the discussion of issues central to the human rights perspective, such as gender equality, the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and the rights of women and young people; investments in sexual and reproductive health and women's economic empowerment; building national capacity to assess, anticipating and planning for population dynamics as an essential tool for planning and monitoring sustainable development.

This report presents the main findings of the consultations and meetings as well as summaries from each of the consultations. Enriched with the detailed analysis of three suggested success stories on children's rights, anti-trafficking and citizens' score cards, this report draws conclusions and articulates certain recommendations on how the challenges can be met – from both perspectives, citizens and public service providers that the UN agencies in the country can take forward in their future work.

## 2. Scope of work

The global initiative to support participatory monitoring for accountability as a central feature of the new development agenda was considered an important theme to convene the national dialogues in the second phase of the consultations. Within this framework, the aim of this assignment was to document the selected case studies and facilitate the consultations with a wide range of stakeholders including youth, women associations, vulnerable groups, civil society organizations, central and local government.

The consultations helped to: (i) showcase how more accountable, transparent, responsive governance is being pursued at the national and local level using either institutional or non-governmental participatory monitoring mechanisms/tools and (ii) explore how participation and empowerment can improve accountability in the Post-2015 development agenda.

### The main objectives were to:

- Identify and create a multi-stakeholder space for dialogue about existing experience, information and knowledge regarding participatory monitoring for accountability and existing and new forms of accountability at different levels so that this can be fed into and inform the forthcoming key Post-2015 processes and decision-making bodies;
- Identify experiences of national, regional and global accountability mechanisms as well as specific proposals for effective post-2015 accountability mechanisms (including methodologies to tailor targets to the national level). These examples and proposals can serve as input to the intergovernmental discussions on the design of the post-2015 accountability framework, including at the High-Level Political Forum and the Development Cooperation Forum.
- Identify, document and highlight examples of current work /innovations from countries that demonstrate innovative local and participatory monitoring activities or initiatives and illustrating how more accountable, transparent, responsive governance is being pursued at country and local levels. These examples can serve as good practices or lessons learned for when the Post-2015 Agenda is actually implemented at local, national and global levels.

## 3. Methodology

The methodology was developed in close consultation with the UN Country Team and particularly the participating UN agencies involved (UNICEF, UN Women, IOM and UNFPA). The platform of the consultations served to identify the stakeholders for each consultation event, promotion tools to ensure event participation as well as included the preparation of a guide for the consultations.

**As previously mentioned, seven consultations were organized, at least one in each targeted region, Shkodra, Lezha, Fier, Vlora, Durres, Elbasan and Tirana, covering transparency accountability and responsiveness of governance.**

**A note suggesting the profiles of participants was prepared and shared with UN agencies and their partners facilitating the process. More specifically, the main categories participating included civil society (representatives from community members and non-governmental organizations), private sector representatives (business organizations and local firms), public sector (representatives from national and local governmental institutions) as well as public and private research centers and individual experts.**

**As a result of combined synergies, about 60% of all participants in consultations were women, while about 20% of all participants were youngsters (18- 30 years of age), while Roma and Egyptian and representatives of other vulnerable groups identified in Albania, were present and actively involved during the consultations. Through the support of UN Agencies and their local partners brief information on the scope of meeting and discussions was shared with participants beforehand. A discussion guide was shared with the agencies prior to the implementation of the consultations.**

**Finally, consultations were recorded for the purpose of reporting and media coverage and dissemination strategy. All activities were closely coordinated with the media and communication strategy under UNRC guidance and in line with UN communication and visibility guidelines.**

### 3. Main findings from the Consultations

- There is a degree of apathy in citizen involvement in governance. It is not easy to mobilize communities to exercise pressure on governments. If community involvement in decision-making is institutionalized, participatory monitoring mechanisms may work better. Approaches such as the Community Based Scorecards are a good way for the community to communicate to the government their problems and priorities, but also a good channel for the government to hear from the community and report back.
- Participatory monitoring mechanisms are often successful, but largely donor-driven. Once the projects end, the practice often ceases. Communities need extra support, in order to mobilize. Donor supported projects have so far played that role, but it would be better that community leaders guide and organize the process. Trainings and information could be provided to these community leaders in order for them to liaise between communities and government. The media needs to play a crucial role in publishing information on consultation events, but also keeping track of developments. Political commitment by the government and politicians is also a precondition.
- The need to strengthen capacities at all levels of government is a recurrent topic that concerns participants in all regions. The government as well as CSOs look for evidence based policy making; but the data and indicators available are often questionable. Governments at all levels should work

on improving accuracy and reliability of indicators: this entails both standardizing definition of social indicators as well as ensuring that these are systematically collected and reported at all levels. Furthermore, governmental data should be released for the use of all stakeholders; we often face lack of transparency in sharing data and information. The availability and accuracy of data is also crucial for participatory mechanisms.

- As far as gender issues, lack of statistical information was also noted together with the absence or dysfunctional work of gender focal points. Social administrators are also the contact point for gender issues and they are overloaded with many and diverse tasks.
- Proper monitoring is lacking at various levels of governance. This is a crucial element that would improve the accountability of public officials and their responsiveness. Perhaps we would benefit from a legal instrument that would set and enforce the monitoring system, so that every policy document integrates a benchmarking system and measurable indicators in every sector, infrastructure, education, health, social services, water and sanitation etc.
- Job descriptions were also mentioned as problematic. The current performance in accountability, responsiveness and other indicators of governance is rooted in weak or non-existent job descriptions for each position.
- Access to information differs from urban to rural areas and access to Internet where most public information is published is not equal for all the population. Although some of the information is made available also through local media, local administration needs to deliver accurate information to the citizens regarding services.
- Information is key to supporting citizen involvement; although Internet is a good information source we should not give up the traditional face-to-face meetings, or public hearings that may also target those that would otherwise remain excluded. Often there are these groups of people that have the highest stake in what government does or fails to do. Also, the government people should not limit their interaction with the communities to one-off public hearings; but always seek to understand the community's opinions on specific issues – this could be done through surveys/questionnaire for example. Also, information to citizens on their rights and how or where to file requests or complaints to the municipality should be more clear and more easily available.
- The participation of Roma and Egyptian communities has increased, especially during the last two years. Representatives of the community have also participated in the budgeting process. A clear example has been the drafting of the local action plan for the Roma and Egyptian communities, where the community was involved from the very start of the process, in the planning phase through the identification of needs and activities that target those needs. Attention was also given to the transparency and informing the community about the process.
- While there have been efforts towards the integration of Roma and Egyptian communities with particular focus on health care, civil registration, social services and school attendance – they seem to be insufficient. Work with these communities cannot be done on a project basis – as information is not easily absorbed by the members of the community

## 4. Voices from Albania - Consultations Summaries

### 4.1. CONSULTATION IN SHKODRA

The representative of the Child Rights Observatory commented that the essential focus of their organization is to monitor the situation on children rights in the country, in accordance with the Children Rights Convention. Their work is closely linked with the national agencies at the national, regional and local level – they focus on collecting data, compiling reports and providing evidence at the local level in order to bring them to the attention of local and regional authorities. Five years following the establishment of the Observatory, they have come to be recognized as an authoritative organization in the field and the mutual trust between the Observatory as a civil society structure and state authorities has been built due to the quality of reports they provide as well as the opened in exchanging data at multiple levels.

Increasingly authorities are turning to evidence based policy making, also under the pressure of civil society organizations. For instance, the Observatory was a contributor to the regional children strategy that was recently drafted for the Shkodra region for the first time with UNICEF support. The strategy is owned by the regional authorities (regional council), but the Observatory have also provided data and reports to feed into the updating process; as well as assessment and monitoring process that is being led by another CSO (“Femijet Sot”). A number of challenges persist, in particular the difficulty in collecting data based on clearly measurable indicators that are comparable at the national level.

The representative of the women organization “*Gruaja Intelektuale Shkodrane*” highlighted the importance to institutionalize community involvement in governance. She presented the positive experience working in several communes in the region of Shkodra, through the community based scorecards method. They have contributed to this project for more than three years now and find that this is a very good way for the community to communicate to the government their problems and priorities, but also a good channel for the government to hear from the community.

***The community, the people need to be more involved with governance, they are often indifferent. If cooperation and participation are institutionalized it may work better. The community here is typically not easy to mobilize in order to exercise pressure on governments, with the exception of pressing emergencies***

***NGO representative***

They do not understand that for instance the meeting of the local council deciding on the annual budget is very important in order for the community to know what is being funded. On the other hand, it does not make sense to involve the community at the very last stages of the budget approval; the local governments should proactively invite target groups and CSOs to provide their feedback on local budgets.

Another *participant from an NGO* mentioned that citizen participation in politics and decision-making processes is crucial. This should start at the moment of elections; when priorities and concerns of the community should be presented to the candidates both for local as well as parliamentary elections. She supported the view of the previous contributor on the importance of participatory budget processes; which should be further reinforced at the local level.

The “*Gruaja Intelektuale Shkodrane*” *representative* stressed the high differences encountered between urban and rural areas in terms of access to information. In the municipality the website reaches out to a good proportion of the population she mentions, but in rural areas we must put additional efforts to reach out



to people. What their organization did in two communes of the area was to support the founding of local associations, which have in turn lobbied with the commune council and actually succeeded in receiving some support. It is thus important that the CSO themselves preserve their ties to the communities. For instance, in the framework of the *community based scorecards project with UN Women support* the local association representing women in the Ana e Malit commune successfully lobbied in favor of physical improvements to the local school; whereas in the Dajc commune a social service center was built.

The *Dajc commune representative* mentioned that the establishment of a one-stop-shop information and service center has made things easier for citizens as well as shortened average response time. The commune also regularly publishes information in all the 11 villages that constitute the commune. Community participation in public hearings is relatively high and increasing; we think this is also due to the fact that they feel that the commune responds to their needs. During the flooding last year that heavily impacted the majority of the population in the commune, we managed to cooperate closely with the community, central government and donors and overcome the difficulties. The community center also caters to the needs of the vulnerable, offers free activities for children, people with disabilities, have managed to get support from several associations with equipment for people with disabilities.

The *Shkoder municipality representative* also noted a positive experience with participatory budgeting; in which the



municipality led a series of meetings with communities in all boroughs, with a good representation of different target groups including women and children. This has impacted budget allocations for the year.

***However, social services are typically at the end list of priorities of any government and we need to compete with other sectors as well. There are still some legal bottlenecks with regard to the possibility to outsource social services to the private/NGO sector.***

#### ***Local Government representative***

The *regional council representative* noted the need for institutions to coordinate between each other in order to make governance more efficient and more responsive to citizens. He highlighted the recent initiative of the regional council together with the Children Observatory and UNICEF have established a “one stop shop” for the referral of cases of children at risk. Institutions should work closely with NGOs, as well because the government and non-governmental organizations need to be complementary in terms of services.

***Participatory monitoring mechanisms need to be institutionalized in order to become more sustainable.***

#### ***Women rights NGO representative***



There was positive experience with participatory budgeting in Shkodra, when main stakeholders, including vulnerable target groups; were participating in council meetings and were able to have an impact on budget allocations. However, once the projects end, the practice often ceases. Communities need that extra support, in order to mobilize. Donor projects have so far played that role, but it would be better for the future of community leaders would guide and organize the process. Trainings and information could be

provided to these community leaders in order for them to liaise between communities and government. The media needs to play a crucial role in publishing information on consultation events, but also keeping track of developments.

The Child Rights Observatory noted that the Strategy on Children Rights and the Action Plan were drafted for the first time in the Shkodra Region through a participatory approach: the communities and especially children were consulted in all the area. It has been a good starting point. However, the driving force for participation and consultation seems to come from NGOs and donors – maybe we will need more time to build the trust within communities that they can make a change.

***CSOs have been working in the region for more than 10 – 20 years in some cases, working with building capacities of the administrations; service managers; contributing to technical working groups. However these interventions have all been supported by door-driven projects – sustainability and continuity is questionable. The only instrument available to ensure accountability is political commitment.***

#### ***NGO Representative***





The Community Based Scorecards is a good experience, which has helped the community through NGO support to identify weaknesses in local government operations and monitoring of what has been achieved. This practice needs to be continued. On the other hand, another NGO representative pointed out that there are multiple projects/strategies but the culture of citizen engagement needs to be instilled in people at an early age; starting from the school children. If they understand what institutions are and how communities may make a change and bring a difference; in the future participatory monitoring initiatives will not need to be financially sustained by donors.

The need to strengthen capacities at all levels of government is a recurrent topic that concerns all participants. The government as well as CSOs look for evidence based policy making; but the data and indicators available are often questionable. Governments at all levels should work on improving accuracy and reliability of indicators: this entails both standardizing definition of social indicators as well as ensuring that they are systematically collected and reported at all levels. Furthermore, governmental data should be released for the use of all stakeholders; we often face lack of transparency in sharing data and information.

***If data is not reliable, we cannot talk about participatory monitoring and accountability – what is there to measure and hold accountable against?***

***NGO representative***

The Child Rights Observatory, which deals directly with data collection and analysis confirmed that there are substantial deficiencies in the quality of indicators. Another NGO representative working with healthcare issues mentioned that they have encountered obstacles in gathering data on access to health services at the local level. An information referral chain is missing in the health sector. This is not so much related with capacity – they have the capacity; but more an issue of accountability. The local communities do not trust primary healthcare services; probably as they encounter negligent medical staff; many young women and



girls prefer to use private practice also for privacy issues. Their performance needs to be monitored more closely also on the basis of cases served.

A psychologist working for an NGO serving women and youth stated that CSOs exist exactly to hold governments accountable and also provide complementary services where the government is not able to fill all gaps. However, civil society needs to be first a watchdog; and then cooperate with the government.

The *Dajc commune representative* highlighted the experience with regard to participatory monitoring mechanism in social services. They have established thematic working groups with the participation of women and vulnerable households; which engage closely with the community and bring forward their priorities. This allows the commune allocate budget funding in support of the community's priorities. However, the main problem is usually employment and there is not much we can do in that direction.

The *representative of the regional social service office* (central government deconcentrated organ) mentioned that there are a number of challenges encountered especially in more remote areas/communes, where the Child Protection Unit is often missing and social administrators often dedicate their time to cash benefits for the poor exclusively, instead of also identifying and reaching out to vulnerable groups in need of services. The chain of accountability is not perfect, case management is often problematic although all actors/institutions come together and the role and responsibilities of each actor are clearly set out. Strengthening capacities is crucial, especially at local government level.

NGO representative is of the opinion that the local governments should not be limited to local council meetings but use a variety of other instruments to involve communities. The real challenge is that:

***“ if these alternative instruments to involve communities exist (as is the case in Shkoder), these only exist until they are supported by funds and donors exercise political pressure”.***

For instance, the social plan of Shkodra does not function properly; a number of working groups and referral mechanisms (anti-trafficking, children etc.); they work well to a point but then civil society organisations which are part of these forums move on to the next project. Our organization has a community/constituency behind it and we always pursue their interests.

***We provide social care services to poor families in Shkodra supported by foreign charities, but the municipality/government itself needs to be self sustainable to support these initiatives that are ultimately in the interest of the local population. Financial support from the municipality is also a statement – that we care about social integration and therefore support it. If local government fails to make use of the power it has, fails to manage instruments available to them for the mere lack of political commitment – the impact that civil society organizations may have is also undermined to an extent.***

***NGO representative***

A member of the local council of the municipality of Shkodra explained that the meetings of the local council are open and transparent; the meetings dates and agenda is always published online on the municipality's

website. However, citizen apathy continues to be a problem; they will not actively participate unless closely linked with a personal interest. This needs to change, as the council is not a forum where individual problems may be addressed.

Information is key to supporting citizen involvement; although Internet is a good information source we should not give up the traditional face-to-face meetings, or public hearings that may also target those that would otherwise remain excluded. Often it is these groups of people that have the highest stake in what government does or fails to do. Also, the government people should not limit their interaction with the communities to one-off public hearings; but always seek to understand the community's opinions on specific issues – this could be done through surveys/questionnaire for example. Also, information to citizens on their rights and how or where to file requests or complaints to the municipality should be more clear and more easily available.

The representative of the Observatory adds to this point by saying that not everybody has access to internet, social media or has computers at home; the more remote the areas are, the less likely they are to have access to new technology. Information available to citizens in these areas is very scarce. It is important that the government/municipality/commune meets with the community on a periodic basis and inform them of new policies or outcomes of existing measures.

## **4.2. CONSULTATION IN LEZHA**

In Lezha, the discussion focused more on accountability and monitoring mechanisms. Representatives from the Regional Council mentioned the Regional Development Strategy, drafted in 2005 that was based on 5 out of 8 Millennium Development Goals. Local level setting clear and measurable indicators and proper monitoring has been the main concern and this is actually a challenge at the national level too. There is no point of having strategies and policy documents that look good on paper but are not implementable due to the lack of measurable indicators that can be monitored periodically in order to be able to trace the progress realistically.

The participation of Roma and Egyptian communities has increased, especially during the last two years. Representatives of the community have also participated in the budgeting process. A clear example has been the drafting of the local action plan for the Roma and Egyptian communities, when the community was involved from the very start of the process, in the planning phase through the identification of needs and activities that target those needs. Attention was also given to the transparency and informing the community about the process. A local health centre is now equipped with a flight of stairs and this was identified as a need by the community. The municipality listening to their concern responded in time by drafting and approving the budget plan and then implemented the construction. The representative of the municipality, who was also a member of the Egyptian community, presented a number of positive experiences. This is also one of the few cases in Albania, that educated members of the Roma or Egyptian community are employed in the public administration, which testifies again the responsiveness of the governance.

Access to services was another aspect that was discussed during the consultation. Civil registration of the new born children has worked well in Lezha accompanied with appropriate dissemination of the information on the process as well as the rights and services that children and family can access if they are registered. Awareness raising and working closely with the vulnerable community has been crucial for the progress achieved so far by the local authorities in close horizontal cooperation. However, financing and cost sharing for activities are hindering further progress and this was identified as a key challenge.

The information and data gathered by the child observatory indicates that standards decrease with the distance from the centre. Child Protection units do not exist in all local government units, especially in the most remote areas and even where they exist scarce funds and human resource capacities result in limited time and inadequate service to the communities.

Education is a big social issue and the current situation of schools is problematic and this has many dimensions.

***A realistic and comprehensive analysis of the situation is necessary before taking the necessary measures for improvement otherwise the whole process will be jeopardized.***

***This approach needs to be taken in every sector, so that problems can be tackled realistically and thoroughly. Otherwise we will just pretend in training delivery, pretend in social care, education and health. The reality is different it is rather grey. A greater willingness is needed from all governance authorities, more passion in our work, financial support and efficient financial planning and management.***

***Public Official***

Improved Roma and Egyptian education was another good example presented during the consultations as a result of fruitful cooperation between local authorities, regional directorates and civil society organizations. Indeed, efforts have been effective in this region. The Regional Directorate for Education will provide free school bags and books for all pupils from these communities to enroll in the high school. Programs for encouraging their enrolment in higher education are also being implemented together with the prioritizing employment of Roma and Egyptian teachers.

The representative from a local NGO, "Shenjta Mari" mentioned also the efforts and good cooperation with the Lezha municipality to address the Roma and Egyptian education needs. The NGO runs a community centre, where trained teachers assist about 180 pupils with the preparation of homework and teach them to be able to catch up with others. Illiteracy rates for children at the fourth or fifth grade was the reason for establishing the centre, which is financed from the Catholic Church with the support of other donors. The centre provides a small cash incentive to the families sending their kids to school as well as school materials, such as books so that they can go to school and after classes stop by the centre to receive further support with their school programme.

These efforts seem to have been successful in keeping the children to school. When parents do not send their children to school this support is halted and expulsion from the social assistance scheme is also proposed to the local authorities.

Regarding the gender issues, lack of statistical information was noted again together with the absence or dysfunctional work of gender focal points. Social administrators are also the contact point for gender issues and they are overloaded with many and diverse tasks.

The common agreement in the meeting was that accountability and responsiveness could only be improved through a sound monitoring mechanism. Currently this is a challenge and it has to start with the appropriate functioning of the structures – gender focal points at the local level.

"Proper monitoring is lacking as an instrument from all levels of governance. This is a crucial element

that would improve the accountability of public officials and responsiveness. Perhaps we would benefit from a legal instrument that would set and enforce the monitoring system, so that every policy document integrates a benchmarking system and measurable indicators in every sector, infrastructure, education, health, social services, water and sanitation etc.

May be UN Agencies could assist us on this.”

Local Official in Lezha



The regional level lacks a detailed and clear picture of interventions from all actors including donors and civil society while at this level statistical data is also difficult to be obtained.

Obtaining data from local units is serious challenge, this is due to a number of factor: the uneven capacities of local government units and their officials, lack of accountability of public officials to respond and respect their legal obligations; bearing in mind that weaker LGUs, in particular those in rural or remote areas do not even gather all data and the existing ones are not reliable. Reliability of data is another major issue. Therefore, serious efforts need to be undertaken to improve the information sharing between local actors and data accuracy. Either e memorandum of understanding or any effective measure that would oblige institutions to share information is necessary. Without timely and accurate data is hard to draft and implement sound local development strategies and plans.

Public Official in Lezha

Participants were in favour of the on going territorial reform trusting that a better reorganization and efficient management of LGUs would bring positive changes at local policies and service delivery. Furthermore, it was also stated that municipality councils will need to gain the trust of the citizens as this is also partially why the participatory mechanism do not work as expected and that the accountability of the elected is low.

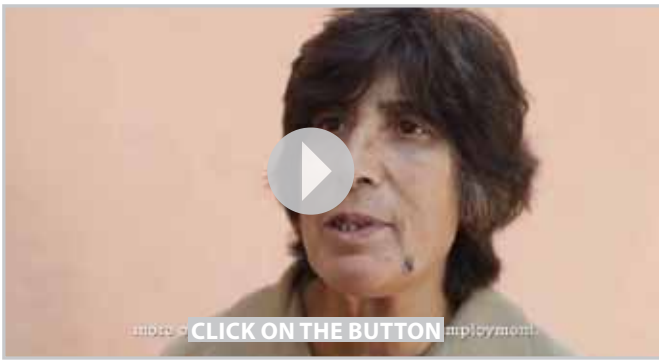
The Territorial Employment Pact was another mechanism that was mentioned during the discussion as a positive case. This initiative supported by UNDP and ILO, through Swiss funding in several regions of the country, Kukus, Shkodra and Lezha, was successful in engaging a large participation of the local community in every step of the process. The methodology used has led to successful implementation of activities and perhaps can be replicated by local authorities in the future and also in other areas.

Job descriptions were also mentioned as problematic. The current performance in accountability, responsiveness and other indicators of governance is rooted in weak or non-existent job descriptions for each position.

*My job description is not clear at all – states a school psychologist – despite the work experience and training qualifications - I still do not know my tasks and I end up doing everything from individual counselling, family coinciding, drugs related issues, anti-trafficking, awareness on sexual transmitted diseases.*

Lack of clear procedures and manuals that can be used in the daily practice was also mentioned. Accountability and monitoring mechanisms need to be improved by starting from the job descriptions, indicators, guidelines and protocols as well as clear management and oversight schemes.

Coordination also works as long as there are issues to be solved and cases to be referred, but the normal practice is mainly to deal with emergency cases rather than a normal standard of work that can began by



information, transparency and prevention before referring cases further for specific services.

The clarification of roles and responsibilities of all actors was also mentioned as an emerging need especially for new services that require the intervention of a number of actors. Cooperation mechanisms and information sharing between similar positions in different institutions was also proposed as a possible measure to be considered for improving accountability and timely response

of the governance structures. For instance, strengthening the role of school psychologist and all actors involved in the referral system was highlighted as key recommendation in order to have a responsive system. This was particularly relevant as a key anti-trafficking mechanism.

Politics is the main source of problems; political parties do not necessary select based on qualifications and merit. Therefore it is difficult to speak on proper transparency, accountability and responsiveness. Community member in Lezha

Finally, a representative of an international organization, raised the issue of the job performance assessment by giving his personal story:

*I was fired by my position at a public institution for not performing as requested, while a job performance assessment was never conducted. This is a procedure that is generally missing from institutions, in particular at the local level. We have ended up at a vicious circle, influenced by political parties, and every time a government changes the staff is changed based on a variety of justifications. Policy needs to be in the hands of technicians. While investing and maintaining sustainable public administration structures is crucial for successful and responsive governance.*

Participants recommended that performance management of public officials and governance in general is an area that requires more attention in the future and that they would welcome any support from the UN Agencies in this direction.

### 4.3. CONSULTATION IN VLORA

A healthcare representative in the region of Vlora presented the positive experience of in this sector in trying to keep track the progress on the MDG health indicators and in trying to ensure a good coverage of services including awareness raising and immunization programmes. The Region of Vlora is also home of Roma and Egyptian communities and the provision of adequate services to these communities has been in the attention of institutions. Information is offered through public health care centers and field visits at schools and universities and in areas where different communities are based. Access to information is reportedly uneven between urban and rural areas regarding health care issues and services in general that can be accessed by all population. It is recognized however, that information dissemination and awareness raising are costly activities while the available resources are really limited.

In this regard, there is a lot to be done, starting from lack or inadequate services, lack of health cards for the Roma and Egyptian communities, and difficulties to comply with the administrative requests and documentation. The discussion among the community members and representatives of public institutions on the other side also pointed out that institutions do not have sufficient capacities and are not adequately



trained to deal with different communities and to prepare the information in the most accessible ways.

Participants also presented specific cases of returned migrant families in need for services and when were identified by a local NGO dealing child rights (Child Observatory) they were referred to respective institutions. The experience has been positive as institutions were very responsive and efficient in assisting them with civil registration issues, checking their health condition, ensuring immunization and issuing the health care cards. Nevertheless, participants identified the need for a holistic approach in social inclusion and service provision as categories at risk are in need of a holistic approach, which seems to be lacking.

***While there have been efforts towards the integration of Roma and Egyptian communities with particular focus on health care, civil registration, social services and school attendance – they seem to be sufficient. Work with these communities cannot be done on a project basis – as information is not easily absorbed by the members of the community.***

***Roma Representative***

Improving access to information and transparency of governance was reiterated, highlighting that web based information is not accessible by all communities and that usually the ones that cannot access it are the ones in greater need for it.

Although there have been a number of activities have been implemented in promotion of safe contraception, data reports indicates that use has not been sufficient. Strategies to target these issues effectively need to be designed in long term and using different messages for different target groups.



Ensuring the participation of women and youth in decision-making was presented as a crucial recommendation for the future. Although, there seems to be an issue of trust and cynicism in participatory processes, it was widely acknowledged that there is still a lot to be done in this direction and therefore it should be made part of the new development agenda.

Access to information in the judiciary system was reported as a challenge by organizations referring and facilitating specific cases. Indeed, it has resulted that only Tirana court publishes court decisions in its webpage, while this is not the case

elsewhere. Transparency in the judiciary system would have facilitated the work of many organizations starting with significantly reducing the time to acquire a copy of the decision, reducing the administrative costs as for every copy there is a fee and so on. This jeopardizes the whole mechanism and responsiveness of the system when these are cases that need fast reaction and good coordination among actors.

***Judiciary is like a locked system; whenever we try to get information while assisting a domestic violence or trafficking case, or even for research purposes, we have been facing serious difficulties in accessing the court decisions. They are supposed to be public and published in the webpage of the court.***

***Representative of a local NGO***

Furthermore, participants singled out the media handling of domestic violence or trafficking cases as being problematic. This is more the case at local media outlets, as national ones may display a higher degree of ethics and professionalism. Unprofessional reporting and breach of confidentiality are serious concerns.

One of the other areas where information is not sufficient has to do with children with disabilities. Information on how to deal with children with autism is particularly missing. This illness is reportedly rather new in Albania and medical professionals and the public at large are not very informed about it while cases are increasing. There seem to be only 3 centers nationwide which limits the access to assistance not only due to the fact that they need the service accessible on a daily basis, but also because the poor cannot afford to travel long distance to treatment centres. One of the representatives, speaking not only as Roma but also as a parent of an autistic child in desperate need for help, stressed again that coverage of services need to be improved at territorial level (capital versus national, urban versus rural, and accessible for all the population). A number of participants expressed the opinion that capacity building activities are needed to prepare the structure to address new needs of the community and upgrade their knowledge and skills at all levels of service provision so the reported cases.

Participatory budgeting was one of the issues that came up. Participants were of the opinion that media and communications need to inform the population not just about when the next public meetings are but also on taxation systems, where citizens' taxes go and how they are spent. This was proposed as a mechanism to improve accountability and transparency and would probably show results on tax collection levels too.





***When the community really wants something, it has found the ways to make it happen. This was the case from Qender Commune the region of Vlora. People wanted an investment in the main road of the commune and managed to have it done through reporting it to national media. This is the power of civil society.***

***Representative from Qender Commune***

The roles and competences of institutions and public officials need to be clarified and linked to performance monitoring. This was one of the recommendations for improving governance. Additionally, a better exchange of information between all actors has to be ensured in the future to improve transparency, accountability and responsiveness of the system.

***At the end of the day, information is not about statistical data on problematic cases under the jurisdiction of a LGU. It is about human lives and as such it requires a systematic and timely approach.***

***Representative of a local NGO***

Participants stressed revising the role of social administrators and matching competences with tasks. They also raised issues of meritocracy and de-politisation of public administration structures as the main guiding principles towards accountable and responsive governance.

***It is true that competition is tougher for highly qualified Roma and Egyptian community members. Employment records in local structures testify for unfair career opportunities mainly driven by political interference. Accountability is really weak.***

***Young Roma Community Member***



The improvement of youth participation in decision-making will certainly contribute to the level of governance. There have been a number of initiatives supported by local organizations such as participatory budgeting and community assessments.

Local structures seem to be positive in including youth in governance processes, but efforts should be made to keep the administration updated and continuously upgrade their skills. Furthermore, in

Vlora as in other cities where consultations were held, it was noticed that participatory governance was mainly perceived as the willingness of public officials to cooperate and open up to communities. This might be partly because the small countries like Albania, even institutional relationships are based on personal relations and often during discussions participants expressed that they solved issues because they have established good personal communication. It certainly is a cultural pattern, but also may indicate that citizenship is rather weak and holding public officials accountable is a challenging task, as it will also need to happen simultaneously with empowering the communities and focus on civic education and their rights.

#### 4.4. CONSULTATION IN FIER

The focus of the consultation in Fier was the responsiveness of government to citizen needs – good governance, accountability, participatory policymaking and consultations. The main challenge identified is the lack of properly measurable data and information. The representatives of the Regional Education Department mention that there can be no accountability without measurability of results. Accountability does not only apply to government, but also to donor funded projects and what results are achieved; with our own accountability as citizens towards the communities we belong to. The degree of accountability is also proportional with the expectations of us citizens from our governments. Hence, participatory monitoring must take into account the need to identify measurable results in line with the citizen expectations. The regional council representative added to this point by bringing the positive example of the UNDP project that worked with communities over a five year arch and provided both hard interventions – infrastructure improvements; as well as soft interventions – capacity building. More importantly, the UNDP intervention helped build a powerful community voice – the leader groups; which till today exercise pressure on government at the local level. We now have a good practice that is also sustainable.

***The change must come from the community itself – the government needs to respond to priorities and challenges presented by its citizens. We are here to ensure cohesion between the different policies and practices; and priorities of the community must be at the top of our agendas at all levels, including those of the UN.***

***Public official, Fier***

The regional council representative mentions that poverty alleviation and social services for the more vulnerable remain relatively underdeveloped. This function is delivered in a decentralised fashion, but there is pressing need to increase capacities of local governments in the field. The majority of local governments have limited staff that are overloaded with administrative management of the cash benefits of the social



assistance scheme and are not able to deal with social care services. This is also a question of accountability of government, as functions need to be backed with financial means – smaller communes do not have the means to employ special social care staff, although their needs may be the highest. The central government needs to support local governments both through strengthening capacities as well as providing the means to deliver functions effectively.

Local government are increasingly taking over responsibilities but do not always have the adequate experience to deliver properly. In the case of social services in particular responsibilities are blurred between the levels of government; it is a shared function as it is delivered locally but the national government preserves its interest and stake in the issue and welfare of its citizens. It should support social services through funding. For instance in Fier which is the center of a big region, we need at least one or two community day-centers for people with disabilities, in particular children with special abilities; whereas we totally lack community or residential centers for victims of domestic violence; children at risk, etc. The lack of facilities is not always because of lack of accountability, but also because of scarce financial resources.

The lack of capacities at the local level is certainly an issue, but it is not as ubiquitous as it is often mentioned says the representative of the Fier municipality. There will always be need to strengthen capacities, not only because circumstances change, but also there is substantial staff turnover.

Access to information is ensured in the municipality of Fier, which publishes information on its services through community campaigns; schools; media. We provide information but are not able to deliver all required services; as existing social services have limited capacity and cannot host all types of target groups.

***There is a high level of difference between the urban and rural areas, indeed there are differences even within the city – between its central and more suburban areas. Needs are typically though higher in more remote areas and the municipality is often encountered with request for services by residents of the other communes.***

***Fier municipality representative***

Access to information and awareness campaigns are also a primary concern in the healthcare sector; which focus in particular on the issues of family planning and immunisation. The Health Department has signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding with the Education Department and they visit all schools and healthcare facilities of the region, including the most remote communes. The main concerns in the field, especially for the younger ages are early pregnancies; failure to adopt protective measures against sexually transmitted diseases as well as lack of awareness on modern contraception methods. Cooperation with other institutions is key to effective implementation of all policies.

Holding people accountable is always difficult, although in theory responsibilities are legally mandated for each institution. In the education sector, responsibilities are shared between the local government and central government. Parents' boards are a relatively new institution that should serve to improve quality in schools and exercise pressure on school management; but its impact is still low as our society is not familiar with these modern forms of participatory monitoring. The boards need to be more active; the entire community needs to be more actively and participate.



***Social problems are not easy to tackle; not with a simple order or a law – they have complications including families, mentalities, economic situation that are difficult to be addresses by the government alone. Greater awareness is needed at all levels – both awareness for people, at schools, at rural areas; as well as awareness on the need for services and support.***

***Public official, Fier***

The lack of standards is a crucial weakness that undermines quality of service delivery in all sectors, including education. Public appointments are often influenced by political affiliations. If there are clear and measurable standards, as well as performance measurement mechanisms for public employees, influence of politics would be diminished.

The issue of the Roma minority was also raised during the discussions in Fier. The Qender commune representative mentions that there is a large Roma community in Qender and they encounter serious difficulties with integration of a portion of this community. Registration in the civil registry is a problematic issue that make take months for each identified case. Integration of the Roma is a challenge that requires coordination at multiple levels and the commune works closely with the regional council, Children Observatory and other NGOs. The objective is not for every Roma child to be enrolled in kindergarten programs, and it requires huge efforts for every single child.

The Voice of Roma in Albania is a new organisation that operates with communities in the Fier region. There are multiple organisations and projects that work with Roma in Albania, but most are donor driven and are cut off once the donor funding is cut off. Hence, it is important that the community itself organises and follows the example of community leaders who have succeeded despite prejudice prevailing in the society.

The representative of the Murialdo Social Center speaks of their experience with the integration into the labour market of youth with difficult social-economic background. These people often serve as testimonials for future generations, inspiration models for youth that are newly found in difficult situation. However, the impact NGOs may have is limited – we can make a change especially in supporting or alleviating individuals or families situations, helping with their social problems, but NGOs can rarely make a difference at the macro level. At this level it should be the community that exercises pressure. Participation in decision-making is important and it should be organised by areas of the cities. It is important that each small community appoint a representative that speaks in their favour.

The representative of the municipality mentions a series of positive practices that may need to be taken forward. The participatory budgeting process, which was a pilot project of the Fier municipality and should be rolled out to all local government units in the region; because it is a good exercise to gather feedback from the community on what are the priority projects; as well as strengths and weaknesses associated with each; as well as the community has a chance to understand where goes the funds that are raised from local taxes. The other positive experience is linked with environmental concerns. The communities need to exercise more pressure on their governments to address the problem of waste and agree with other institution on the designation of a site and building of a landfill.

#### 4.5. CONSULTATION IN ELBASAN

Participants in Elbasan stated that access to information differs from urban to rural areas and access to Internet where most public information is published is not equal for all the population. Although some of the information is made available also through local media, local administration needs to deliver accurate information to the citizens regarding services.

Interestingly, the majority of citizens become informed on decisions of local authorities only when they feel their rights have been compromised. A typical example presented was related to property rights in a commune:

***“The commune council approves the opening of a new road without taking into consideration the properties affected. A citizen complains to the prefecture at the moment the machinery starts the work to demolish his wall because no one had informed him about it. This is a clear example of a total lack of information at all stages.”***

Generally, in municipalities are better informed and flow of information is faster also responsiveness of public officials is better but still not always timely.

Participatory budgeting seems to be a mechanism that has been implemented successfully during the past years. This approach includes meetings in different administrative units with representatives from regional directorates, municipality/communes and citizens.

Elbasan represents one of the good practices regarding municipal – citizens' cooperation. Women organizations have played a key role in participatory budgeting and through gender lenses starting from 2007 and also Citizens' Based Scorecards from 2011 with the support of UN Women. The initiative that started at the Municipality of Elbasan was later replicated in other local government units supporting the budgeting process and women empowerment. The served as a tool to encourage women to voice out their concerns and monitor the work of local elected - thus keeping them accountable. Furthermore, these efforts were also extended to women's participation in politics by lobbying for the increase of women's participation in elections and respecting the 30 % quota for gender balance.

Through these efforts, the civil society organizations enabled the articulation and collection of women's viewpoints and opinions. In the words of one of the representatives:

***“Albania was lacking a culture of women's active participating in the decision making as the process is very male dominated. Women started to express their needs, which added a real value not for the sake of gender balance but most importantly for the typology of requests articulated – men were usually asking for investments in roads while women were asking for more nurseries and kindergartens near to the communities and pavements so that their children could walk safely to school. This diversity of opinions was beneficial for all the community”***

Another example was brought from 2011 local elections when both candidates included the full package of requests from women. Currently, they are active in monitoring the performance of the LGUs and some of 2011 promises have been kept. However, the LGUs suffer from financial constrains and difficulties in gathering revenues.

An additional effort towards accountable governance relates to women employment – in Menglit, a poor commune within the Region of Elbasan Region. This commune is the home of many businesses but they do not necessary comply with local taxation regulations. Women from this commune expressed their concern regarding employment as these businesses were employing people from the town of Elbasan rather than local ones. A proposal was forwarded to the head of commune to discuss with these businesses about employing local women through a negotiation of tax dues. This is not achieved yet and it will hopefully be done. Richer localities may have certain incentives to negotiate and succeed for their social concerns. Poor units on the other hand, face serious difficulties in gathering revenues and are very weak in demonstrating the authority of a local government unit that is reflected in their tax collection rates. Businesses in these areas are not accountable to anyone and they do not feel they have an obligation towards the community. Which is a vicious circle as these LGUs complain about lack of funding for investment while their tax collection performance is very weak and there is scarcely any incentive or pressure to perform adequately.

Another example was presented from the local coordinator of a Child Lead Group, called Voice + 16, which focuses on supporting and monitoring the implementation of children's rights and protection. Children are involved in drafting periodic monitoring reports, participating in meetings with representatives of LGUs and presenting their experiences in various forums nationally as well as internationally such as the UN offices in Geneva through the support of Save the Children. Children have voiced out their concerns related to the quality of education, school attendance of rural girls, health education and awareness, cooperation with the police and other local authorities. The annual report which is published in different media and is drafted by children themselves, lists their main concerns and findings from the monitoring of children's rights.

The general perception of participants regarding horizontal cooperation was positive and this is mainly the case when solving emergency cases or case referrals. There are periodic reports prepared for central

institutions and these reports are prepared in cooperation with all institutions at the horizontal level. However, a common approach towards periodic and standardized information sharing prevails in the country and this was also noticed in the city of Elbasan. Every institution publishes its own information in their webpage or newsletters they produce, but there are no links in providing a full information package to citizens.



Local mechanisms like anti-trafficking working groups and other technical groups seem to work well and there is a good cooperation among actors to address the presented cases. Furthermore, the State Social Services is engaged in raising the capacities of local staff through its regional directorates. However, all the participants seem to agree that efforts are needed to strengthen the role of social administrator and increase the awareness of the heads of LGUs on the importance of equipping this role with professional and dedicated staff with clear tasks, focusing on social inclusion and protection measures. Hopefully, more clarity on this role will be achieved through the on-going social care reform process.

Another key recommendation that was articulated in the consultation that took place in Elbasan is related to the territorial coverage of services, including social care services and employment, which is absent in particular in rural areas.

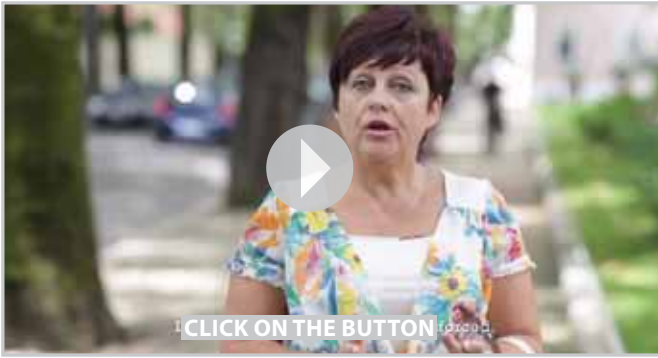
***For a better service provision for cases of domestic violence, all structures – public and civil society need to cooperate better in order to be able to ensure a good coverage of the territory, including the most remote areas. There are villages not yet reachable by public transportation and with poor infrastructure – people there need timely access to services too.***

***Local NGO***

Furthermore, the representative from the Regional Directorate of Social Services also mentioned efforts for improving the social protection system. Currently, Elbasan is one of the 3 regions selected for piloting the reform on social protection (cash assistance). The system features now a digital and improved outlook that is expected to provide better access to the social protection scheme, reduction of abuse cases and a better coverage overall. Flagrant corruptive cases from local public officials in charge and abusive behaviour particularly noted prior to elections were some of the previous problems mentioned by the participants. The current reform is expected to contribute towards accountable, transparent and responsive governance by accurately targeting families in need. The law for this reform was passed in the Parliament in 2012, and the piloting phase is under implementation.

***There are about 6.000 more applications this year, compared with the previous one, as a result of information campaigns and information dissemination. Certainly, this has also to do with the fact that citizens are beginning to trust in the fairness of the programme and feel encouraged to apply. Combined teams from central and local government are conducting field visits to inform the citizens on this reform and standards.***

***Local Official***



Information flow starts from the municipalities or communes – which have been considered as the first entry points for citizens who are later addressed in the departments or institutions that have the competence to deal with a specific problem.

***Regarding the exchange of information with vulnerable groups, the approach to school attendance of the Roma and Egyptian communities in the Municipality of Elbasan is worth mentioning. Prior to the beginning of the academic year, meetings are organized with the community to try and raise their awareness. However, this is a practice followed in the urban areas, specifically in the city of Elbasan where this community is based in an informal area that also includes migrants from surrounding villages.***

***Representative from Elbasan Municipality***

However, school attendance of Roma and Egyptian communities remains a challenge despite the efforts of local actors. There is a procedure in place followed by LGUs regarding the identification of dropout cases and referrals that lead to the drafting of specific actions plans which are in support of the family and the child. In this process, the exchange of information between the involved actors is crucial. Information from the community has proved to be pivotal, but its internal organization is weak and the local civil society organizations need further strengthening. Housing and infrastructure continue to be their main drivers of exclusion.

***In my opinion, an information office for all the social services offered at the regional level by public or non-public actors is necessary.***

***Local official***

The health sector at the local level is more organized from the protocol point of view. There is a clear calendar of immunization which is strictly followed by the Regional Directorates of Public Health. Particular attention is paid to raising awareness on health care issues, the importance of immunizations for children as well as regular checkups for women and girls. In regards to vulnerable groups, further assistance is offered including registration and the provision of free access to health services, such as free mammography and pap tests for women and girls. While in rural areas, reproductive healthcare, despite progress, is still considered a taboo as localities are rather small and everyone in the village will find out. Information flow and awareness raising was presented as a challenge that needs to be tackled in a permanent basis with a particular focus on rural areas, starting from contraception, reproductive healthcare and the rights and services accessible by the communities.



***Citizens in need to fill in application forms, write requests and follow simple steps of starting an administrative procedure. There are citizens that do not even know where the relevant offices are and what services they have the right to access. This is one of the biggest challenges for local movements.***

***Local Official***

A stronger cooperation is needed with the Public Health Directorates as well as civil society groups in order to extend the services and information in all areas.

***In our country it seems that problems do not originate from the lack of legal provisions. Laws exist, but their enforcement is weak and the capacities of staff in charge for their implementation are also poor. This is not new and it still continues to be an issue.***

***NGO representative***

Participants seem to agree that efficiency and performance should be closely linked with proper monitoring. This will facilitate greater accountability for everyone that provides services to citizens – being public or private. Clear roles and completed sets of instruments have been articulated as emergent needs.

***A more informed community can voice out clear and loud their needs and problems. We are also aware that we often rely on informal networks. We should not be blaming the social administrators for not knocking at every door, but there is a need for more information and awareness raising actions reaching equally all communities through the use of different ways.***

***Community Member***

It is hard for women living in conservative environments. These are women fully dependent on their husbands and are engaged only with family care and housekeeping. Their only source of information is the word of mouth through their neighbours and acquaintances. They have no other means of accessing information, therefore information flow needs to be channeled properly in order to reach them out. There have been cases when these women were divorced or widows and suddenly had to confront a totally alien world.

Participants also stressed that information exchange and communication should be established with other regions as well. Information exchange in this case is only facilitated through the central government and the relevant ministries, while there are cases that need timely response from local institutions. These are cases particularly related to the Roma community moving from one locality to another or even neighbouring countries. In addition, awareness is also needed towards identified cases with autism in order to tackle the stigma this category faces.

Participants listed as successful interventions projects targeting employment issues and initiatives targeting divorced women, especially those divorcees resulting from long term migration of their husbands – identified as a need by the social administrators. These projects have the potential to be replicated in other regions too.

## 4.6. CONSULTATION IN DURRES

The organization of such consultations testifies that our perceptions and voices matter. This is also shown during the daily work of some local institutions. The work of the anti-trafficking structures operating in the region includes a technical round table that functions at the technical level. This is one of the most serious forums in the region of Durres that analyses such an important issue – as trafficking is no longer seen as the concern of the Police. It also falls under the remit of state social services as well as the education department. Through this round table all institutions are bringing their perspective with the intention of extending this work at every local government unit. The concern that we are gathered here has to do with the way development goals of the future will be pursued. Without proper tackling of human trafficking and domestic violence there will be no progress in society. The Prefect operates a weekly slot for meeting people and registering their concerns as well as follows up with the relevant offices. The Services' Office is the one that establishes and maintains the connections with other public institutions – including employment, social assistance and other issues such as domestic violence. Employment is the most tangible problem and many people have voiced their concerns at the prefecture. Requests are then followed up and there have been cases where employment was provided and issues of social assistance were resolved. The most important thing is to properly guide citizens about their needs as a lack of information about legal procedures and entitlements is noted.

Cooperation with local offices is also present and the office of the Prefect together with the employment office has organized informative round tables on employment. People appear to lack information and this cooperation has resulted to be fruitful either in terms of procedural or personal follow up. A certain change



has been noted in communications from the employment office through the use of leaflets and media outlets people. As a result, more attention is being turned to the employment office.

Mechanisms that are employed are somehow defined by the category of a given issue such as gender equality, vaccination, domestic violence and the trafficking referral system. The Social services department is in charge of vulnerable groups. The system of social assistance delivery is totally revamped and people can apply at the local administrator through a very simple form.

This is a points based system but people are not well informed about it. It is now in its third month of implementation and local administrators are tasked with the publication of the necessary documents. It must be said that while digitalization is facilitating a better service, is also causing concerns to people as they are not clear about their entitlements This again underlines the important role of local administrators.

The coordination of services was mentioned as a positive experience from the Observatory. The establishment of a One Stop Shop for children in cooperation with the region's children's rights office that would identify the issues and needs and then work out for solutions is piloted in three regions of Albania. Coordination appears to be a crucial issue that goes beyond children, as there are many other vulnerable groups which require protection. Although in legal terms, rights are fully guaranteed, in the practical sense communication is not functional and often the individual cannot properly address his or her need for support. As several issues are part of the bigger problem tree a proactive approach was taken.

After establishing contacts with the heads of communes and municipalities for the identification of children in need, parents or any other relatives were reached out to find an institutional solution. This approach did not mean to substitute institutions – what it did was actually to pro-actively orient people



in need to the institutions that would take on the case. In difficult cases of lack of information or inability of certain individuals, institutions were alerted for the existence of a potential problem. Such approach is in line with what the Ministry of Social Welfare is trying to achieve – grouping and harmonizing services through a coordinated approach. It is interesting to note that in these recent years, the establishment of multi-disciplinary groups at the municipality level or ad-hoc at the regional level focusing on children’s issues have brought together several institutions and forged a cooperation spirit that had generated some moments of success.

Another issue that was highlighted during the monitoring of the regional strategy 2005 – 2015 is the fact that local social administrators are very busy dealing with the social assistance paperwork and have no practical time to dedicate to other social services.

***Social Administrators are also often subject to requests that go beyond their remit. Their work is heavily affected by limited financial means and very scarce time to dedicate to case management. Certain communes and municipalities lack even the appropriate structures for gender equality and domestic violence.***

***Local NGO***

As far as education is concerned, a novelty can be reported in terms of teachers’ appointments. The role of the teacher is now closer to the community, which now has the right to opinion in regards to the qualities of a certain teacher. The school board as well as the parents’ council have a greater role in the appointment of teachers and the hiring process is now delegated from the education department to the relevant school. Competition is now taking place and a commission is in charge for the selection. The school’s director is not part of this commission. New procedures for the selection of school boards have also been approved through a consultative process and Durres is already in the implementation mode. Hopefully, the new management style will also lead to a better identification of potential dropout cases. The admission of returning migrants’ children has also been smooth.

***The transformation of schools into community centres is the real qualitative change that will bring the school even closer to the community.***

***Regional Directorate for Education***

***This approach is now being tested in a few schools and soon feedback from the community and the children themselves will be available as these piloting schools have been identified as problematic in terms of dropout rates.***

***School Director***

Durres is reportedly a model of cooperation among all actors – prefecture, region, municipality and NGOs. Technical round tables such as anti-trafficking are fairly normal and provide a forum for discussions. The challenge is how to build on this existing coordination to improve the social economic situation of people. Existing capacities in Durres especially in the health sector are recognized and there are many experienced people. The health centre even won a prize – friendly to children as a first model in Albania. However, one of the pitfalls of this sector is related to health indicators, as they are not credited to health institutions only, but also to the coordination and cooperation among many others. If a low rate of a certain disease is reported, this may also be due to the contribution of many.

***Sometimes the health indicators do not properly display the dimensions of a problem such as for instance the indicator on breastfeeding or the need for new indicators, say health services for disabled children. There are so many strategies without budgets – no budget is made available to local departments for the implementation of strategies. As the challenge is to improve the social and economic situation, it is also necessary for the local units to promote healthy nutrition that is one of the MDGs.***

***Local NGO***

The cooperation with the state social services can be singled out. While promoting family planning, it was noted that many mothers and parents had no information about the existence of the local administrator. We then discussed with the SSS and the Child Protection unit to invite social administrators and beyond the strictly health scope to provide to inform people about the importance of cooperation with the social administrator.

As far as the social services are concerned – the focus has been on poverty reduction through services for the people in need and improved access to the labour market through vocational training. This has mostly been



done through the support of international partners. Attention has been paid to the sustainability and the follow up of these projects especially in terms of working models as well as capacity building of local government officials.

At the same time, services have been expanded with proper standards in place. Child support is now under the responsibility of local governments and certain services are provided for abandoned children and residency care. Services for the elderly have been reconstructed and reorganized



and are now supported with municipal funds. Community centres are now becoming active in the suburban areas in support of Roma communities. Although established with the support of UNDP, their management is done by social services and activities that are used to disseminate information and at the same time serve as a contact point for community problems which are then referred to the relevant public offices are regularly organized there. This is a functional approach that bridges the community

with the service providers and it would be good for these models to be replicated in other municipalities. For instance, for the network against domestic violence we are considered a model municipality and are currently serving as an example for other communes and municipalities especially with regard to the referral mechanism of domestic violence coordinated with the legal and psychological service, all covered by municipal funds.

What seem to be indispensable is the stability of structures and the preserving the qualified and trained staff after power shifts. Participation of all actors and interest groups – beyond local government units is also necessary to ensure the civic voice and opinion.

Local Government Official

Advisory groups are supposed to support budget planning and formulation in Durres. Other mechanisms that have been reportedly used in Durres are the community liaison that provide support and serve to channel citizens' opinions. Yet it is not clear how active these mechanisms are and they will need proper training to ensure transparency and increase accountability.

## 4.7. CONSULTATION IN TIRANA

***As a matter of fact, I live with the problems of the community, trying to solve as much as I can as per my competences that are defined by the law. I am of the opinion that local government in Albania is not fully decentralized and competences are vague, especially at the commune level. On the other hand, with my experience in various positions in local government, I can say that citizens' voice is being heard to some extent, but its strength in influencing decision-making is weak.***

***Participant from LGU of Paskuqan, a commune near Tirana***

The region of Tirana is home to a large concentration of NGO-s and international donors operating in the country. Furthermore, during the last two decades it has faced considerable internal migration flows, the majority of which has been established in suburban areas of Tirana and existing communes. The result is that some of these communes are now comparable in size, and even bigger in some cases, with important towns in Albania. As such, Tirana features a number of issues in different dimensions and LG units have insufficient resources and unclear competences to deal with all the specific cases they face.

As stated by one of the participants from one of the biggest communes near Tirana, some of the main problems faced in the communes are domestic: child' rights and child protection, poverty and unemployment. Low employment rates have been registered also for the young and better-educated generation.

Participants stated that there is a need for a national orientation regarding employment. Orientation can start from career counselling for specializations or studies in response to the market needs. Participants stressed limited financial resources in LGU.

***We try to be part of the solutions needed by the community – but we are not the solutions.***

***Participant from a commune near Tirana***

The poor who are particularly in more need to access services face difficulties, starting from the difficulties to comply with criteria for economic aid. Administrative requirements are sometimes too cumbersome.

Perhaps for families in extreme poverty, the administrative requirements for accessing the economic aid may need to be eased. The land certificate is difficult to be obtained also, as poor families may be living in informal settlements and land is not registered, or also because the administrative procedure of requiring a copy of land/property certificate is not easy and has certain administrative costs.

***Communes use the emergency fund in cases that require fast response. However the fund is small and is not adequate for the needs. Currently we have an emergency – 4 children in the street, the father in prison, mother with mental issues and those children need emergent care. We have raised the voice everywhere we could but all procedures require time.***

***Public Official, commune near Tirana***

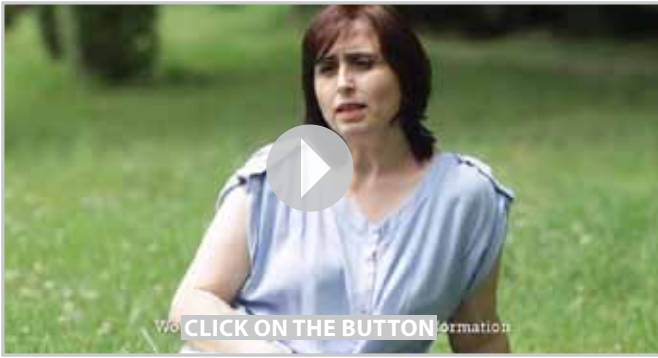


The difficulty to deal with emergency situations has been noted in most of the visited towns. Emergency care centres and faster response mechanisms are under discussion, however, most of the similar cases are dealt through the intervention of central government and State Social Service.

Furthermore, a better linkage through all grievances institutions, so that the public officials can check themselves and verify any given case's compliance and then trigger immediate action would certainly ease the burden to the population in need for services. The modernization reform of the social protection system is currently in the piloting phase and the electronic system is designed so applications will be filled online. Hopefully this reform will be able to establish a responsive system for those in greater need.

In my opinion, there should be a greater cooperation between local governments and the social services. It seems that whenever there is a difficult case, the first ones to be informed are the media and not the relevant authorities. I am not saying that this is necessary a bad approach as media has helped us to identify cases we were not aware of, but cooperation among local and central structures of governance is substantial. The government owns all the necessary mechanisms, starting from temporary economic aid, food packages and other means until all legal and administrative paths are completed and specific help finds its way.  
Public Official, Tirana

A representative from Save the Children presented the work of this organization to empower children in raising their voices about their rights in three pilot regions. There have been a number of positive steps achieved with regards to influencing local policymaking and raising their awareness on child's rights. Furthermore, they mentioned the case of Elbasan as a success story where their lobbying efforts had a greater impact as the municipality of Elbasan responded to most of the needs. Furthermore, for the first time, this organization with the support of European Delegation in Albania will be implementing a project on children's budgets. The rationale behind this project is that in Albania it is difficult to have children's visible budgets. This project will assess the implementation of the National Action Plan for Children, its objectives and budgeting performance, in order to be able to advocate based on clear evidence on public spending on children. On the other hand, objectives need to be linked with clearly identifiable budget



lines. The missing link between objectives and budgets is a general weakness in the policy making process in the country. This project will be a first tentative in this direction so that policies are not unreadable documents but can be easily translated into services for the targeted groups, with clear monitoring indicators and budgets.

Data gathering was another issue stressed by the participants as it is an important aspect which hinders a responsive and evidence based

governance. Accuracy and reliability of data was also raised as an issue, together with the cooperation among actors to share information.

Strategic planning is a key function of the second tier of governance, regional councils. There is an immediate need for standardizing the requested data, as so far we have not been working with a standard set of data that can easily be used for example for territorial planning, or any other strategic planning. This is a major concern for the policy design and planning of any action.

***Instructions regarding data are fragmented and not complete, we lack a full set of approved data that need to be gathered by all, with clear definitions and instructions all standardizes.***

***Participant - Regional Council of Tirana***

As raised by one participant of a local NGO, the Child Rights Observatory, in line with the Millennium Development Goals and the child's rights have established a set of indicators to collect, about 180 indicators, but only 40 of them are standardized that have been possible to be collected. Lack of standardized data is indeed a great challenge for having evidence based policy planning and taking well-informed decisions.

Participants mentioned that there have been significant improvements but the system needs more efforts, starting from dissemination of information to the groups in need, data collection and participatory governance. It was clear that the situation differs from urban to rural, and differences are more visible between bigger municipalities and communes in remote areas, or those with a large number of internal migrants that have transferred their social problems to the current locality. Communities in these areas practically need support and services in every direction, social care, education, health, immunization, housing, etc.

However, it was stated that even in the most advanced cases, round tables or consultation meetings include mostly civil society organization members but not representation from the vulnerable groups.

Another positive example is the anti-trafficking mechanism which representatives presented from the ministry of interior and civil society organizations working in this field. This is a typical case when different levels of governance and non-public institutions need to work together in identifying, preventing and referring to the specific cases. Although a lot has been achieved in this direction, it seems that when one goes down at local level, the local structures do not know the existence of such mechanism that is supposed to be active at the regional level as well.

***The lower you get into the levels of governance the weaker the dissemination of information seems, and the larger the disconnection with the national policies.***

***Public Official, Tirana***





Furthermore, one of the participants argued about the role that the government should have with regards to service provision and responding to the needs of citizens. This is an obligation of the government and it should not be replaced by the role of the international community or civil society.

***It is clear that governments in Albania face difficulties due to limited resources. However, the government should go beyond the coordination of donors, civil society and implementers of service provision projects. It should take the lead and act with greater responsibility towards its citizens in order to guarantee sustainability in long term.***

***NGO representative, Tirana***

Drafting good policy documents without proper costing and sufficient information on the problems jeopardizes the whole process. In addition, better cooperation with local government units was stressed by most of participants as a key recommendation for the future. Their capacities regarding new policies and initiatives need to be strengthened in order to be able to translate the policies at the local level through standardized procedures and monitoring indicators.

## 5. Best practices from Albania

### 5.1. Community Based Scorecards (CBS)

#### 5.1.1. Context

Women's situation in Albania continues to be characterized by a number of obstacles, beginning with unequal access to sources, possibilities and benefits up to a low level of representation in politics and public decision-making. Despite a steady increase in the number of women in parliament (7% in 2005, 16.4% in 2009 and 17.8 in 2013), the situation of women is not favourable, while women representation at the local level is even lower.

Although legal provisions both at the central and local level define the need for public consultations during any decision making process, such practices of involving the citizens in decision-making are not very common. Local communities are particularly very little informed of the tasks, responsibilities and functions of the local governing units. Inadequate financial and human resources at the local level leave issues of gender equality across all walks of life largely not addressed. The work of UN agencies tries to fill parts of this gap through the promotion of tools and mechanisms that encourage women's participation and at the central and local level so their needs and priorities are taken into consideration in the budgetary allocations and local development efforts.

Through the engagement of various civil society organisations, many initiatives have taken place with the intention to increase public participation. Concrete mechanisms of dialogue between citizens groups and local authorities have been applied to advocate for and monitor commitments injecting a true sense of accountability to local officials.

The implementation of CBS work focused on two directions: (i) establishing an interface community and local authorities as service providers and (ii) Institutionalization, advocacy and monitoring. Crucial to the success of the CBS has been the mobilization of the community, advocacy and lobbying with the local authorities as well as their involvement into the dialogue with the community aiming at the institutionalization of the entire process.

#### 5.1.2. Intervention

Community Based Scorecards were introduced before the 2011 local elections in Albania as a mechanism for identifying the community needs and priorities in some regions of the country. It was a mechanism that was anchored in the Albanian Women's Manifesto drafted and agreed by civil society organizations with the support of UN Women during the 2009 National Elections. Considering that a vast amount of work had already been done with the Women's Manifesto, which was orchestrated by civil society groups and grassroots NGOs with the support of the United Nations during the 2009 National Elections, it was agreed to use it as a basis for the 2011 local elections. As a result the areas of focus for the Community Based Scorecards were based on the areas identified by Women's Manifesto.

Both Women's Manifesto at the national level and Community Based Scorecards at the local level were formulated and used with the intention to generate debate on gender issues that political parties, government, state institutions and society at large need to address and hold decision makers to

account for their national and international obligations towards gender equality and women participation in decision making. The main objectives of this work was establishment of women as a political constituency whose voice and vote should be heard and ultimately promote the participation of women in the ballot and decision making.



*Gender scorecard*

The Manifesto consisted in four main pillars starting with equal participation and representation in politics and decision-making that aimed to ensure the quota representation of women in the elections' candidate lists. In

addition it included a call to stop violence against women and measures for improving their economic situation as well as better social services, health care and education.

Citizen Based Scorecard was a new approach that aimed to identify and then prioritise the women communities' needs through monitoring government policies and political parties' behaviour towards the gender equality legal framework. It was initially implemented during 2010 – 2011 in seven regions of Albania. The selection of the regions was done based on a adequate geographical coverage that would also provide a good inter-regional comparative overview. During the second phase in 2012 the network of NGOs that piloted the CBS, established mechanisms of dialogue between women's rights groups and local authorities on the basis of CBS to advocate for and monitor commitment to the gender equality in local planning and budgeting. The last phase consisted in implementation of one of the priorities identified through CBS that was Women Economic Empowerment.

### **5.1.3. Impact**

100 meetings took place with the participation of nearly 2000 voters that were asked to simply score from 1 to 5 the services offered from the local government units as described in the Women's Manifesto. This process identified some issues that received low scores that indicated low participation of women in public decision-making and the absence of enabling strategies. In addition, lack of information and specialised personnel in cases of domestic violence and absence of local policies for the re-integration of violated women were also singled out. Furthermore, the lack or rehabilitating centres for women subjected to violence was evidenced. In other dimensions, the absence of local initiatives for women's employment, lack of local social centres, street lighting and waste collection were some of the areas that were highlighted as problematic.

The CBS is reported to have enabled a true dialogue between women and local authorities that in turn produced concrete results in making local officials be more responsive to the needs and priorities of women. The monitoring of the fulfillment of the commitments made by the local authorities during the first phase of the CBS process testified for the efficiency of this mechanism in producing tangible results.

In more detail certain positive examples of the impact include the fact that local authorities addressed women priority issues identified in the course of the CBS process. For instance, the Municipality of Vlora, following the CBS 2011 recommendations established a toll free phone number (24/7) in collaboration with the Regional Police and the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Abused Women.

In another dimension, local authorities were committed to address the outcomes of the “Community Based Scorecards” through local strategies, plans and annual budgets. As a result of 67 lobbying meetings held with the local authorities in all the targeted regions, local officials expressed their commitment for including the issues raised in the process into their plans and strategies. Taking this approach to the next level, possible ways to institutionalize the CBS process were identified such as the idea to establish a board of experts consisting of women and young women of different professions in support of municipality of Shkodra. In rural areas of Tirana, a draft agreement aiming to institutionalise a dialogue mechanism between local government and citizens was introduced and the economic empowerment of women – especially through the establishment of *social enterprises* directly followed up of the work of CBS.

Further analysis was dedicated also to local information gathering and strategic and budgetary processes. In the areas where the CBS took place, only a few municipalities had budgeted for the necessary public services. Their weight in the budget reached a rather insignificant 1-2% and this is mainly in urban areas. Rural budgets made no provision for services due to limited resources. Even those local units that were slightly advanced and had prepared local strategies had no costing and missed indicators for measuring progress.

An added value that needs to be included in this positive account is the fact that post-CBS work is already underway. During 2012 the network of NGOs that piloted the CBS, established mechanisms of dialogue between women’s rights groups and local authorities on the basis of CBS to advocate for and monitor commitment to the gender equality in local planning and budgeting. NGOs informed local government authorities on CBS process and advocated and lobbied with local authorities for addressing gender priorities at the local planning and budgeting. Frequent forums of dialogue took place with local authorities on obligatory regulations for inclusion of public participation mechanisms such as CBS, in their agendas that in turn has enabled citizens to monitor the local authorities’ commitments in addressing gender priority issues.

#### **5.1.4. Way forward**

The CBS served to establish a solid baseline of accountability of local officials versus their voters and civil society. In each of the regions where it was implemented, the civil society and women’s groups possess a new package of indicators based on primary needs that are used to monitor the work of local units and progress at large.

One additional benefit of this work relies on its potential to transform the CBS into a tool that can reinvigorate the community spirit and incentivise its members to express their opinion on the acute problems. One of the implementing partners of UN Women – the Gender Alliance for Development believes that the CBS model can be expanded and replicated in other regions of the country. It aims to build and consolidate a network of local social experts that are to be known as Social Auditors.

## 5.2. Albanian National Referral Mechanism for Identification and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking and its Task force

### 5.2.1. Context

The Government of Albania has recognized combating and preventing trafficking of human beings as one of the primary and fundamental challenges in the areas of human rights and law enforcement. The fight against trafficking in human beings became a significant priority in the program of the Government of Albania since 2005, when the first important legal and institutional steps against human trafficking were undertaken.



*Albanian National Referral Mechanism for Identification and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking and its Task force*

Albania remains a source country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour. According to the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report (2014), Albanian victims are subjected to sex trafficking within Albania and in the European Union and neighbouring countries. Some women are subjected to sex trafficking or forced labour following arranged marriages or after accepting offers of employment in neighbouring countries. There is an increasing problem of Albanian children, often of Roma ethnicity, being subjected to forced begging or other forms of compelled labour.

### 5.2.2. Intervention

Fight against trafficking in human beings needs a comprehensive approach, with the coordination of prevention activities, prosecution of traffickers, and protection and assistance to victims. This comprehensive approach can only function if actors from many different sectors work together. Stakeholders working in the area of anti-trafficking identified the need to have a coordination mechanism in place to enhance coordination and improve quick assistance to the victims of trafficking (VOT). For this purpose, in 2005, the National Referral Mechanism for the VOTs was established. It coordinates the identification, return, reception, referral to assistance and reintegration of the VOTs or potential VOTs. The Cooperation Agreement establishing the National Referral Mechanism was revitalized and expanded in 2012, in order to include more actors that have a stake in the area. Currently, the National Referral Mechanism for the Enhanced Identification and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Interior/National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator; and it has members from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Education General Prosecutors Office, IOM and six non-governmental organizations (including four shelters).

The NRM is in charge of monitoring, identifying and referring cases to appropriate services. It is also in charge of public awareness activities, focusing on prevention of trafficking through better awareness on the phenomenon and the definition of trafficking (such as forced labour) beyond the commonly known sex trafficking.

### 5.2.3. Impact

Identification and referral of the trafficking cases are the most critical steps in providing assistance to victims of trafficking. The establishment of the National Referral Mechanism has ensured that all actors involved are institutionally committed to provide all the necessary support in a timely and accurate manner. In particular, the establishment of the NRMs ensures that beneficiaries are served more efficiently; response times and resource mobilization times are shorter.

From an organizational point of view, the NRM is an efficient mechanism for reducing the administrative burden of the member institution. NRM is a technical level forum with the participation of practitioners from the state authorities as well as service providers. As such, the processing time for each case is relatively shorter for each of the institutions and information is regularly shared among all partners, thus improving horizontal coordination. As of 2014, the Responsible Authority has been re-established to serve as the operational support for the NRM.

In November 2013, the Task Force under the leadership of the newly appointed National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons (Deputy Minister of Interior) has been created to effectively ensure a participatory monitoring process of the agreement implementation by allowing all signatory members be part of it, know how the implementation process is going and take common informed decisions for improvement of the assistance provided to victims/potential victims of trafficking in Albania. The NRM has also revitalized regional anti-trafficking committees., Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator was for the first time provided with modest funding in order to implement activities and ensure coverage of the whole territory of the country and take advantage of the local knowledge of local people in the identification and referral of cases.

Activities in the area of prevention and awareness raising have also intensified. Albania is one of the first countries in the region to make use of modern technologies in order to address pressing social issues. An emergency phone line free of charge to call or send SMS, accessible by all telephone operators in the country, was established to report suspected cases of trafficking. In addition, a smart phone application was developed for the same purpose and can be used by citizens to report suspected cases of trafficking in real time.

### 5.2.4. Way forward

The NRM is a sound platform for inter-agency coordination, which is crucial for addressing social problems and in particular trafficking of persons. In the absence of this mechanism, responsiveness and services to victims of trafficking would have been much slower and less efficient. NRM is also comprehensive, as it includes members from government institutions as well as international organizations and NGOs that are active in the field.

The mechanism ensures that information is shared in a timely fashion, and possible solutions are elaborated among technical group meetings. A monitoring mechanism that was recently incorporated to the NRM may play a positive role in ensuring that all NRM members are held accountable for their contribution.

In the future, staff capacity of the Office of the National Coordinator who chairs the NRM should be increased in order to ensure proper functioning of the mechanism. Furthermore, the government should continue to work closely with NGOs and other organizations for the identification, referral, support and reintegration programmes for the victims of trafficking.

## 5.3. Child Rights Observatory

### 5.3.1. Context

There has been a renewed commitment of the Government of Albania towards the improvement of the standards related to the protection and respect for the rights of the children in the country. The 2009-2013 National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) set the objective of deepening the legislative and institutional reforms, to create a protective and comprehensive environment for children. On the other hand, the Strategy for Social Inclusion points out the necessity to implement laws concerning the protection and promotion of children's rights, in particular with regard to the right to life, the right to healthcare, education, and normal development. A National Plan of Action is also prepared for the period 2012 - 2015. A Law was adopted in 2010 "On the protection of the rights of the child" with the subsequent establishment of the State Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights.



*Child Rights Observatories*

yet, the commonly shared view is that child support work is fragmented; lacks appropriate coordination and results are not quite visible. In order to strengthen the institutional support to children's rights, a few other interventions have taken place such as the establishment of the Commissioner for Children at the People's Advocate Office; Child Rights Units (CRUs) as mechanisms for surveillance, monitoring and realization of national and regional policies for children's rights, as well as Child Protection Units (CPUs) set up in collaboration with local government to act as the front line actors reaching out to families in need of support and provide necessary referral service (currently operate in several major municipalities). Useful as they may be, the coordination of their work has proven not to be an easy task. Coordination is an issue both horizontally (inter-sectoral) and vertically (inter-governance).

### 5.3.2. Intervention

In this context, the Observatory of the Rights of the Child is a mechanism run by civil society (<http://www.observator.org.al/>). It is an initiative of UNICEF Albania and the "Albanian Children Alliance" that started in 2009. Its purpose was to establish functional mechanisms for the collection of information and for observing the situation of children's rights in all the regions of Albania. It has established offices in the 12 Regions of Albania and functions as a platform of exchange of experiences between different local institutions and organizations.

It is tasked with increasing the awareness of society, families, communities and children themselves on the obligations of state authorities. In more practical terms, the Observatory undertakes collaborative initiatives and exchange of experience with organizations working for children's rights and associations of children and youth. It prepares and distributes annually a technical report on the situation of children in Albania and periodically collects data from the departments of health, education, and social protection at regional and local levels, but also from other national and international agencies. Quarterly reports on child welfare indicators are also prepared and a database to assist in the preparation of these reports is also

maintained. It is very active in strengthening the relationship with all state institutions, civil society and interest groups at the regional level, to maximize citizens' influence and participation in children related issues.

Due to the lack of the evidence based policy analysis from a child rights perspective, data on social exclusion of children is almost inexistent. In this backdrop what the Observatory is doing is more than welcome from all the actors that took part in the consultations. It has become by now a well-known mechanism for both state and non-governmental organizations, media and public at large as they fill a practical vacuum. Research, analysis, data collection, advocacy and accompanied by case oriented coordination and liaison are all lines of work that is appreciated across the board to the point that resources are continuously being invested in its work either from national civil society outfits or international partners.

### **5.3.3. Impact**

The positive experience of the Observatory has led to the piloting of One Stop Shops where data management and analytical capacity of the child observatories is integrated with the regional/local government institutions for the protection of children's rights. Indeed, during this past year, May 2013 – May 2014, the Observatory in collaboration with Child Rights Units, managed to implement a new harmonized approach of children's social welfare services provision at a regional level. The One Stop Shop consisted in strengthening the collaboration and coordination of activities of all social welfare mechanisms at a regional level to effectively implement the legal provisions. This approach, piloted in the first phase in Shkodra, Kukes and Fier, assisted in designing an integrated, coordinated child –centred approach to social care and social welfare service provision (because it covers health, education, social protection in cash and in kind, social insurance where it applies etc.) that is currently non-existent. In these three pilot regions Child Rights Units are about to be transformed to Social Welfare Regional Service.

Through this approach the Observatory succeeded to establish a common agenda for Observatory and CRU daily engagement, as well as for strengthening the role of CRU in identifying and guaranteeing children rights (as per the Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 266, dated 12.04.2012). In practical terms, the Observatory and CRU share the same office and work jointly in identifying cases of child's rights violations and addressing them to the relevant regional and/or local structures. They work together in finding out best practices and contributing appropriate solutions through the existing mechanisms and frameworks. The approach has proven to be satisfactory and efforts are underway to extend this work to other regions with the ultimate aim to cover the entire country. This joint work has added value to the issue of accountability, as the Observatory acts as a functional bridge between service providers and children and their families.

It is clear that the government has taken certain measures to advance the child rights agenda. This had led to some improvements in coordination and seemingly, accountability is also addressed as the Regional Councils are put in charge to coordinate and implement decentralized regional policies. However, a recent evaluation underlined that although there has been good cooperation of institutions, the level of commitment has not been equal. Some Regional Councils are more active than others and some regional branches of line ministries were not responsive to the Observatories' requests for statistical data.

The Observatory's experience has shown that coordination and harmonization of existing capacities is possible and can actually produce effective services for children. Existing institutions can be easily transformed into a unified and sustainable government mechanism designed to ensure that no child remains excluded.



#### **5.3.4. Way forward**

Although sustainability may be in question – due to the reliance on external funding and the fact that it may initially give an impression of a duplicated effort as it performs tasks that public bodies should – the Observatory is a success story in Albania. It is a fact that government –central, regional and local levels do not provide enough funding on children’s rights and no massive increase will be expected any time soon. The lack of capacities at the local level is also a long process that requires a certain understanding and commitment to be shielded from politically-driven uncertainties. The territorial reform currently underway in the country will certainly lead to a better management of human and financial resources at the local level. However, its impact on social issues and especially children may not be massive in the short run. Therefore, there will always be a need for support – either with research or additional services to complement the shortcomings in local public services. As long as these challenges will remain, the work of the Observatory will be more than relevant.

## 6. Key messages for the global development agenda Conclusions and Recommendations

- Government at all levels should be committed to citizens' involvement in decision making and institutionalize mechanisms for mutual accountability. Political will for citizens' involvement is crucial in order to make the process meaningful.
- The culture of participation and citizen engagement is not yet instilled in the local communities. Citizen engagement/ participatory monitoring mechanisms seem to work efficiently in multiple cases, although they remain typically donor driven in Albania. However continued participatory monitoring initiatives may help raise awareness and increase willingness of citizens to get involved in public affairs.
- The role of civil society organizations is fundamental in ensuring accountable public institutions. Civil society organizations should continue to work with communities to mobilize and bring their voice forward; as well as monitor and hold governance accountable against its own objectives.
- Participatory policymaking and monitoring is especially crucial for vulnerable communities. Governments and CSOs should make additional efforts to reach out to vulnerable groups with particular needs, and involve them proactively in the governance processes.
- Public consultation is not an end in itself; instead it should be a channel of communication between governments and constituencies. Consultations should not be a one-off exercise, but should be carried out periodically. Participatory budgeting exercises require that communities are consulted for at least half a year prior to budget adoptions. Monitoring mechanisms are essential in order to ensure proper follow-up to issues.
- Information on public consultation events and opportunities for public engagement should be made public through a variety of measures, including innovative ways such as social media and mobile devices. Interaction between the public and governments may also make use of these channels. However, in less developed countries where Internet access is limited, traditional consultation and information methods should persist.
- Transparency and accurate/reliable information is essential in enabling participatory monitoring mechanisms. Governments should ensure that the quality and availability of data across all levels of governance is good and information is readily shared with all interested parties. Accountability systems need to be based on a set of measurable and comparable data across different territories.

## 7. Advocacy and Communications around Second phase of Post 2015-Monitoring and accountability

An advocacy and Public Information campaign was drafted and implemented during the Second phase of the consultation process in Albania. The campaign aimed at informing the Albanian society about the ongoing consultations; engage people in discussions and advocate for strengthening the voice of citizens in issues that affect their lives.

The Campaign also aimed to:

- Advocate for a Post 2015 framework that empowers people through participatory and inclusive processes responsive especially to the needs of the most vulnerable.
- Ask citizens to input into the consultations for advancing a post-2015 development agenda.
- Raise awareness that Post 2015 has a human rights based approach to development that instills that “none is left behind”
- Promote inclusion, participation at all levels of society.

### 1. Branding the Second Phase of consultations

The second phase of consultations was branded as: Future We Want: Voices from Albania. A logo and image produced were used throughout the campaign, in banners, and featured prominently in TV spots, Video Spots etc.

### 2. Communications Channels

U N deployed various communications channels to send the message across, engage people, share information about ongoing consultations and keep citizens informed in real time on the consultations process and discussions.

- **Social media Platforms:**

Summary of each and every consultation was posted in real time on UN social media platforms such as Face book and Twitter.

Video footage from consultations was prepared, highlighting key discussions and posted on social media.

Around 15.000 visitors/week were registered on UN Social media platforms.

**Face book:**

<https://www.facebook.com/UnitedNationsAlbania>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/UNDP-Albania/302120716513378?ref=hl>

**Twitter:**

[https://twitter.com/UN\\_Albania](https://twitter.com/UN_Albania)

All video footage from consultations posted on **YouTube:** <http://www.youtube.com/user/UnitedNationsAlbania>

### **UN Website:**

Stories about consultations were posted on the UN Albania website.

[www.un.org.al](http://www.un.org.al)

### **MY World Survey**

Simultaneously with the ongoing consultations, the UN carried (?) kept sharing my World Survey 2014 and encouraging Albanian citizens to vote. The survey is available in Albanian Language. Around 2800 Albanians voted. Top priorities are: Better health care, a good education, better job opportunities and an honest and responsive government.

### **Media**

Briefings on the Post2015 Agenda with the UN Press Club members.

Press Releases issued.

Consultations taking place in several regions are reported in the local press.

Consultations reported on national press:

<http://www.ama-news.al/zera-nga-shqiperia-seanca-e-radhes-e-konsultimeve-publike-ne-vlore/>

“Zëra nga Shqipëria”, seanca e radhës e konsultimeve publike në Vlorë | GAZETA DITA

<http://www.ama-news.al/okb-ne-shqiperi-organizon-konsultime-publike-zera-nga-shqiperia/>

<http://www.tiranaobserver.al/okb-ne-shqiperi-organizon-konsultime-publike-zera-nga-shqiperia/>

<http://gazetadita.al/okb-ne-shqiperi-organizon-konsultime-publike-zera-nga-shqiperia/>

### **Voices of people:**

Besides face-to-face consultations, the voices of citizens were also captured through video materials. 25 individuals from all walks of life in Albania spoke about issues of concern to them and asked for ways to be found in order to to illicit their voices on issues that affect their daily lives.

The 25 video stories are posted on UN social media platforms and shared extensively with a diverse audience.

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# 9. Annexes

## Timeline of Consultations

<b>Date</b>	<b>Region</b>
June 27, 2014	Shkodra
June 27, 2014	Lezha
July 1, 2014	Elbasan
July 4, 2014	Vlora
July 4, 2014	Fier
July 7, 2014	Durres
July 9, 2014	Tirana





# Country Report

Second phase of Post-2015 Development Agenda Consultations

Transparency, Awareness and Responsiveness

*“Voices from Albania”*

Tirana, July 21, 2014