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**Swiss Agency for Development  
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# **SWISS - ALBANIAN PARTNERSHIP IN SUPPORT TO DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

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SWISS - ALBANIAN PARTNERSHIP IN  
SUPPORT TO DECENTRALISATION AND  
LOCAL GOVERNANCE



## FOREWORD BY THE AMBASSADOR

Switzerland is engaged in supporting decentralization and local governance in Albania since more than 20 years. Decentralization is a state reform which aims to improve effectiveness of public administration and efficiency of delivering services to the citizens. Local governments are also closer to the population and in this sense, able to respond to their priorities and concerns considering the local realities. Decentralization wouldn't be complete without local governance, this means encouraging municipalities to be accountable toward citizens and transparent in the management of their financial resources, ensuring that no one is left behind. A proper decentralization goes together with a stronger democratization.

Albania engaged in this ambitious agenda since 2000, including a far reaching Territorial Administrative Reform. Switzerland has been supporting the country in this long way through a multi-tier approach: strengthening capacities of municipal governments and councils for assuming their roles and responsibilities but also contributing to the reforms at national level and coordinating its work with other development partners. I take the opportunity to thank in particular our international partners CoE, UNDP, USAID, our implementing partner Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and local organisations. We are glad to present you today some of the most important results Albania has achieved with the Swiss long term support.

Decentralization and democratization are living processes. Albania made important steps in this direction, steps that are at the same time relevant for its European integration. Even if the road is still long, let's continue to advance on it together, side by side, citizens, private sector, authorities and development partners!

**Adrian Maître**

*Swiss Ambassador in Albania*

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## ACRONYMS

<b>ASPA</b>	Albanian School of Public Administration
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>HRM</b>	Human Resource Management
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>OSSH</b>	One Stop Shops
<b>TAR</b>	Territorial Administrative Reform
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>WiPN</b>	Women in Politics Network

For over twenty years, Switzerland has assisted Albania in its efforts to consolidate local democracy and further the process of decentralising power from the central government to the local one.

The support has been continuous, comprehensive, and instrumental to Albania's preparedness for EU integration. Building on a combination of bottom-up and top-down interventions, Swiss support to local governance and decentralisation has been multi-dimensional, and has resulted in momentous change and impact on three levels.

**Citizens**, the foundations and primary intended beneficiaries of a democratic governing system, have increasingly benefited from improved access and service provision, including greater and easier access to administrative services through the establishment of One Stop Shops and digitalisation of 109 services, expanded and improved access to solid waste management services to at least 172,000 more citizens across 7 municipalities, and enabled access to safe, reliable, quality and affordable water and sewerage services during 24 hours/day to local communities of over 55,000 citizens. In addition, they have benefited from improved institutional managing practices, as is participatory municipal budgeting.

**Local governments**, mandated to serve its local constituencies through the provision of public services, in a qualitative, efficient, inclusive and transparent way, reengineered the practice of managing and delivering administrative services to its urban and rural core. Significant results were accomplished in the field of service provision, including solid waste management as 18 municipalities managed to develop and implement Local Integrated Waste Management Plans in compliance with legal requirements, of which 7 providing this service for the first time, extending service to areas previously uncovered by service as was the case of the Dibër Municipality increasing coverage to 57% as opposed to 24%, increasing coverage of the service cost through tariff collection from an initial baseline of 65% to a 95-100% rate as it the case of Shkodër Municipality, Water Supply and Sewerage in selected number of municipalities in the country, as well as capacities and mechanisms for the provision of social care services for the first time locally, in at least 16 municipalities. They strengthened their fiscal discipline and capacities through a shift in the institutional mindset in the way public finances are planned, managed and monitored. Similarly, Human Resource Management improved, having been introduced to a new culture of communication through Information and Communication Technology internally, and among relevant counterparts at central and local level. Improvement in administrative services resulted in citizens being less exposed to corruptive practices. Through cross-spectrum local alliances, women engagement in local politics was elevated to more inclusive quotas and more proactive roles as part of the municipal councils.

**On a national level**, actors have been supported in key processes related to the decentralisation reform, through technical knowhow, direct contribution with concrete input feeding important processes as was the case of the Territorial Administrative Reform, and the Public Administration Reform, and numerous drafting processes of legislative frameworks relating to medium-term budget programs and strategic development plans and services such as Solid Waste Management.

In retrospect, reflecting upon the trajectory and dynamics of Swiss support in Albania over these 20 years, copious work has gone into strengthening local democracy in Albania, and furthering the process of decentralising power from the central government to the local one. Most importantly, insightful feedback can be drawn on what resulted highly effective and beneficial, and what could be enhanced for future support, considering that the decentralisation process is still an ongoing process, and Albania's preparedness for EU accession is contingent on it.

## 20 YEARS OF ENGAGEMENT OF SWITZERLAND IN SUPPORTING DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

### 2.1

#### THE APPROACH OF SWISS SUPPORT TO DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN ALBANIA

The Swiss believe in democracy and power entrusted to the people. This domestic governance paradigm, has underpinned Swiss international cooperation and support, and proved vital to emerging democracies, such as Albania.

2020 marks five decades of diplomatic relations between Albania and Switzerland, and two decades of Swiss support to strengthen local democracy in Albania, and further the process of decentralising power from the central government to the local one, ultimately contributing to Albania's preparedness for the EU integration process.

The Swiss support has **been long-term and systemic**. For over 20 years, the support has been relentless, closely assisting the strengthening municipalities, as well as contributing to momentous reforms in all its unfolding dynamics, as has been the case with the decentralisation reform, which had already started in 2000, followed by the Territorial Administrative Reform, the Public Administration Reform, and the ongoing processes of regionalisation.

From the outset, the Swiss support has adopted a **multilayer – multi actor perspective** on several levels:

- It has helped in the **shaping of the reforms** and discussions, as was the case of the decentralisation reform, whilst many interests were at stake, by offering technical knowhow to feed the discussion on the territorial administrative reform; and very importantly, by creating synergies with other ongoing initiatives, and making use of its ongoing projects.
- It has built **alliances** with other donor funded projects, by teaming up in joint programs or initiatives.
- It has enabled **alternative voices** and contributions to processes, both locally and nationally, by supporting different state and non-state actors, such as civil society organisations to contribute with alternative views to important processes on a national level.
- It has factored **women's role in politics**, by creating enabling mechanisms and instruments such as the Women in Politics Network, that lead to increased gender considerations and engagement of women in policymaking.

In the process, it has also maintained a **flexible approach** to respond to evolving priority needs, in a timely, open manner, and has supported independent alternatives to enrich the actors' perspectives, and educate and cultivate actors to engage in policy discussions in an informed way.

Looking back, amidst the plethora of processes and actors supported, and challenges tackled by the Swiss over the twenty years, lies **a wealth of achievements and lessons learnt**, on a citizen, institutional and national level, a highlight of which we are sharing in the following pages. They are a good foundation for the capitalisation of experience of the work conducted so far in the form of direct support to decentralisation and local governance on a national level, and through services locally. Most importantly, they are a valuable input for future support in furthering the evolving and yet-to-complete process of decentralisation and EU integration.

## DIRECT SUPPORT TO DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE THROUGH PROCESSES

Direct support to decentralisation and local governance was notably focused on the establishment and operationalisation of One Stop Shops (OSSH) in municipalities and administrative units, the improvement and consolidation of public finance management practices and capacities, and Human Resource Management alike. An important crosscutting component, is that of supporting the increase of women participation and role in politics and decision-making.

### ● RESULTS



#### CITIZENS

##### Administrative services through One Stop Shops

The establishment of the One Stop Shops proved an instrumental step in achieving important tangible results on a citizen level. The citizens, of whom a good part, living in the highly fragmented, remote and mountainous areas of five municipalities in Northern Albania, gained (for the first time) access to a varied range of at least 109 municipal services.

About 83% of these citizens, who live in the peripheral areas of the municipalities (Shkodër, Lezhë, Vau i Dejës, Mat and Klos) spend significantly reduced time in the administrative unit centres, to acquire the services they need.

Citizens from 10 administrative units in the Municipality of Shkodër, amounting to over 16,000 households, are all equally connected to the municipality, as all 9 One Stop Shops operating on an administrative unit level, are connected to the main one.

Provision of a significant range of municipal administrative services through the One Stop Shops, has resulted in citizens being less exposed to corruptive practices and pressure to bribe.

Reduced exposure to different offices to acquire different services, has resulted in citizens receiving their required administrative services, in an increasingly transparent, qualitative manner.



#### INSTITUTIONS

##### Administrative services through One Stop Shops

Five municipalities in Northern Albania, including Shkodër, Lezhë, Vau i Dejës, Mat and Klos, reengineered the practice of managing and delivering administrative services to its urban and rural core, by digitalising 109 services and making them available through the One Stop Shops.

The provision of administrative services through the One Stop Shops, reduced the interface and exchange between various municipal administration/offices and citizens, concentrating it primarily on the OSSH front-desk. This shift resulted in higher efficiency and effectiveness of work processes - marking a 2-fold increase in municipal revenues (from both citizens and businesses) in the Municipality of Shkodër. Very importantly, this shift led to lesser opportunities for corruptive practices to take place.

Provision of administrative services through One Stop Shops was taken over at national level through subsequent national initiatives following the territorial administrative reform.

Currently, Shkodër is one of the few municipalities following the Territorial Administrative Reform that has managed to connect all its administrative units with an integrated One Stop Shop service. Through the digitalisation and provision of services through the One Stop Shops, management at municipal level improved their performance monitoring practices.

The establishment of One Stop Shops streamlined the offering of administrative services provision, enabling municipal administrative staff to make more efficient and qualitative use of time at their disposal: instead of having to personally meet all citizens approaching with a query, administrative staff can focus on a multitude of tasks, which in turn is more beneficial to the institution/local community.

### **Public finance management**

A shift in the institutional mindset in Public Finance Management: Municipalities were introduced to the concept of strategic planning and assisted with knowhow and capacity development to shift from poor short-term budgeting and planning practices to medium-term budget programs and strategic development plans. Municipal capacities were developed in aspects of annual budget preparation, execution and monitoring, long/medium-term strategic and financial planning, performance budgeting, etc. In more specific terms, 29 municipalities managed to develop their own participatory development strategies and financial planning documents.

Such shift, changed the way municipalities prioritised capital investments as well as strengthened the fiscal discipline and lowered municipal debts, resulting in municipalities such as Shkodër, to having no more debts.

Instead of the sole responsibility and product of the finance department, the municipal budgeting process now involves all departments and is driven by strategic priorities, clear objectives and performance indicators. To this end, in addition to being representative, inclusive and transparent, the budget also serves as a monitoring instrument for management.

Municipalities developed structured opportunities to discuss with their local constituencies on budgeting needs and priorities, in the form of participatory budgeting practices, sometimes boosted through the use of the Smart Budget Transparency tool;. It is worth noting that participation and representation of women in the budget consultations has significantly increased, progressing from consultations being held separately, to consultation processes being held jointly.

### **Human resource management**

The work with the Department of Public Administration to develop integrated communication platforms for the public administration now [www.administrata.al](http://www.administrata.al), is a product of several years of work that allows local governments to adopt the same Human Resource Management practices as those on a central level. The platform enables local governments to shift toward modern Human Resource Management (HRM) techniques, through transparent and simplified recruitment management and vacancy planning processes.

Municipalities, and HRM staff in particular, were introduced to a new culture of communication through Information and Communication Technology internally, and among relevant counterparts at central and local level.

The use of the platform(s) has demonstrated decreased political bias and pressure on local officials when it comes to recruitment processes, increasing the chances of merit recruitment in the public administration.

Key strategic decision-making in municipalities, is evidence-informed (and more transparent) as it is based on real time data and key performance indicators.

For big municipalities, i.e. the Municipality of Tirana the use of the platform(s) has been instrumental to producing real time reports and updated information on the main indicators of the HRM such as recruitment, dismissals, promotions, court cases etc..

While facilitating the work of the local level institutions, the new platform *administrata.al* enables the Commissioner for the Oversight of Civil Service to have timely access and monitor HRM practices, and the Department of Public Administration is enabled to prepare accurate and timely reports on public administration reform as part of EU progress report for Albania.

### Women in Politics Network

The Women in Politics Network (WiPN) was successful in bringing together Women Councillors and establishing 33 local alliances country-wide from across the political spectrum, in advocating on pressing local issues affecting women, in the municipalities of Tiranë, Lezhë, Vlorë, Fier, Mat, Korçë, Shkodër, Klos, Durrës, Elbasan, Cërrik, Lushnje, Malësi e Madhe, Kukës, Has and Tropojë, etc.

In the process, the WiPN made public resources and politics on a local level gender sensitive, supporting significant increase of women engaged in politics and improved policymaking, from 12% to 35%, in line with the 2015 Electoral Code provisions of 50% quota for women.

The work of local alliances, resulted in a number of concrete successful interventions locally, focusing on a variety of social inclusion issues, including: financial support to women entrepreneurs in setting up businesses (Municipality of Tirana), successful advocacy for reductions or waving of specific taxes and tariffs for (single mother) women head of households (in the Municipalities of Shkodër, Klos, Mat, Fier, etc.), making the city more accessible for mothers and children as well as for people with mobility impairment through construction of 90 ramps in the city of Lezhë, establishment of the Gender Equality Commissions (in the Municipalities of Durrës, Elbasan), support with social care services to women victims of domestic violence (Municipality of Korçë), support to women attending vocational training courses in the Municipality of Vlorë, etc.



## NATIONAL

### Decentralisation Reform

Over the years, the Swiss have provided hands on support to deepen the decentralization process in Albania. The Territorial Administrative Reform initiated by the Government of Albania in 2014 was an important milestone for deepening and consolidating the decentralization process. Albania for the first time has created a comprehensive and adequate social inclusion and protection policy framework in line with the country decentralization agenda and the introduction of new competencies including social services at the municipal level. As the reforms entailed political decision making for both territorial amalgamation as well as functional and fiscal decentralization for Switzerland it was important to both provide timely support as well as allow for multi-stakeholder informed policy making. As such they employed an integral, multi-layer / multi-actor approach, to contribute directly to the reform process through:

- making use of Swiss existing projects to provide technical knowhow which policy relevant actors could use to discuss the depth and scope of the territorial administrative reform,
- supporting of alternative non-state actors to become a proactive part of the process and add to

the plurality of the discussions on how consolidation at local level could take place collaborating with other donors to coordinate and align resources for supporting the government in legislative changes,

- taking part in the multi donor funded initiatives to support the government with the implementation of the reform.

During the policy formulation stage, key stakeholders were provided with “the study for the functional area”, used for the agglomeration by the government; further, to diversify perspectives, a nongovernmental organization was supported to develop an alternative proposal for the agglomeration. Although, the focus of the reform was only at the first level of local government, a proposal for regionalization and reforming of the second level of local government was put forward for discussion.

National actors and local elected representatives, despite various interests at stake, were convened into a ‘Consultative Council’ - a formal platform for increased political dialogue and policy advice to enhance and institutionalise cooperation with, and between the actors of both levels.

The Government of Albania, through joint efforts of various donors and the Swiss, committed to further decentralization through the “Cross-cutting strategy on Decentralisation and Local Governance 2015-2020” and related legislative framework concerning the role, functions and organisation of the local self-government, as well as important aspects on public finances as was the new Law on Local Finances and its sublegal acts.

## ● LESSONS LEARNT



### CITIZENS

#### Administrative services through One Stop Shops

Investments in Information Technology processes and infrastructure should be matched by well-trained human resources, who are able to not only deliver the administrative service in a timely, efficient and qualitative manner, but also nurture “trust” among citizens who are being introduced to such a modality anew and are used to having to meet in person the specialist “behind” each service. The citizens experiencing the positive tangible benefits of accessing administrative services, are numerous. This has raised the need for increased digital literacy and access to ICT among citizens, which would allow them, in the near future, to access certain administrative services directly from home, without having to travel to the One Stop Shop.

In highly remote, and low access communities, being able to acquire administrative services through One Stop Shops, can lead to emancipation and empowerment of the woman figure, enabling and encouraging her to engage more in matters related to services. The indirect educational effect can be applied also to the other part of the population, creating the necessary preconditions for our society to transit towards other forms of electronic services.

Levels of disparities can be smothered if people are offered the possibility to communicate directly with the institutions/authorities to acquire services of general interest. In fact, this is one of the preferred measures, to tackle the peripherality of regions.



## INSTITUTIONS

### Administrative services through One Stop Shops

In countries like Albania where many services and processes are developed from the ground up, the use of Information Technology (IT) offers great opportunities to transform and introduce services that were not provided before. For this to happen, in an efficient and effective way, it is important that investment in qualitative IT, is also matched by qualified staff, supportive processes and administrative structures, and institutional commitment to maintaining and financially supporting this service overtime.

Use of Technology can be easily hampered by technical and cultural bottlenecks. It is important for strong leadership to sustain change until the results are achieved in full and both local administration and citizens experience the benefits of new technology.

### Public finance management

While development projects are transformative by nature, it remains a challenge how to support municipalities with their needs and find the right way and entry point to induce change that enables them to move into a new frontier in line with national policies and EU requirements. Performance based budgeting was a logical step to deepen systemic changes and make municipalities work on a performance-based approach. Hence, the readiness of local government (culturally and technically) in the context when this principle is not yet adopted at central level might affect the final result.

Seemingly, adopting and embedding strategic planning and budgetary practices into municipal operations varies among municipalities reflecting their capacities and leadership commitment. As such, from a development intervention perspective, it remains a challenge how to balance between showcasing success stories and streamlining new practices across municipalities based on a well-established regulatory framework to be provided by the government.

### Human resource management

Developing the portal *administrata.al* was a learning curve, meaning not all efforts to provide an integral solution have delivered on first attempt. While the Swiss flexible approach made possible to develop an integrated platform, the ultimate success will depend on the commitment of the institutions to mitigate cultural, human and administrative barriers so that various platforms are integrated into one, which is used in full by all local governments.

Human Resource Management practices entail both cultural change and pressure on the administration for new skills and knowhow, almost an alibi to discontinue it. There is therefore, a great need for leadership and proper legal frameworks to enforce its application

Public Administration Reform is a high priority as part of the EU integration process. Responding to such high priority entails that EU integration process will sustain positive pressure to implement the reform in full also at local level.

### Women in Politics Network

While it is important to increase the awareness for the role of women in local politics and demonstrate what increased women engagement in politics can do, the challenge remains on how to balance such *spontaneous initiatives* with long term change based on genuine demand and ownership by women. Women engaged in local politics, reaching out to women in their respective local constituencies on

matters of particular concern for women, increases their legitimacy as representative power figures on a local level, and increases trust.



## NATIONAL

### **Territorial Administrative Reform as part of the Decentralisation Reform**

Territorial Administrative Reform, was a major transformative policy reform with ramification at different levels; political, administrative, sectoral service delivery etc. A key takeaway lesson therefore is, how to ensure that, through different mechanisms, policy actors are capacitated and induced to engage in policy discussions in an informed way. A point in case is the multi-layer, multi-actor approach adopted by the Swiss in support to TAR, which ensured that all perspectives and levels of local governance became part of the discussion. Such an enabling approach, could further support and benefit Albania in its efforts to fully comply with the Copenhagen criteria, meaning further decentralisation of public administration and reinforcement of the capacities of both local administration and local elected representatives.

Synergies and alliances during key reforming processes with other ongoing initiatives and actors as was the case with the USAID, UN, and Council of Europe, and as the Swiss approach has *effectively* shown, can help, add to the necessary momentum required to advance important reforming processes.

Flexibility in project design and implementation, as the Swiss support has shown, was a positive approach (if capitalised), which allowed for adaptation to evolving dynamics and context, as was the example of the Territorial Administrative Reform.

The decentralisation process, and the territorial administrative reform as an essential part of it, cannot be considered a concluded business. Despite much progress there is still a need to support and sustain these ongoing reforms. As such, the ongoing decentralization reform, could benefit from donor joint efforts, complementarity and continued support in the mid-term.

## SUPPORT TO DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE THROUGH SERVICES

Support to decentralisation and local governance through services was focused on a number of services provided and rights to be claimed at local level, including Solid Waste Management, Water Supply and Sewerage, and Social Care Services, introduced as a recent function for local governments following the approval of the new law. The social rights to be claimed by the vulnerable include the rights to adequate housing, health, education, participation in cultural life, social security, protection of and assistance to the family and to civil registration. In addition, support was provided also to Local Economic Development.

### ● RESULTS



#### CITIZENS

##### **Solid waste management**

Citizens in 7 municipalities, especially those living in rural remote areas of Shkodër and Dibër municipalities, away from the urban centre of the municipality, were for the first time provided with the service of Solid Waste Management, estimated at app. 172,000 persons.

In addition, knowhow on composting and other means to reduce waste were shared with the local communities in 18 municipalities.

Following several years of work, the number of citizens paying the service tariff increased, resulting in some municipalities, as is the case of Shkodër, managing to cover the service cost almost entirely through the tariff (95%-100%), as opposed to the initial baseline (65%).

An increased number of citizens gained access to the service, as municipalities managed to extend their service to areas previously uncovered by service, as is the case of the Municipality of Dibër, currently covering 57% as opposed to 24% of the territory in 2008.

##### **Water supply and sewage**

A local community of app. 55,000 citizens in the city of Lezhë gained access to safe, reliable, quality and affordable water and sewage services during 24 hours/day, compared to an average of 12 hrs/day in 2010.

The support improved the services of water supply and sewage for the citizens including the outskirts of the city of Lezhë, where underprivileged people from rural mountainous villages were settled during the transition period of 1992-2017.

Overall, citizens receive a more qualitative water supply and sewage service, less prone to informal connections to the main water supply system.

Consumer satisfaction was increased by at least 50% as complaints were reduced from approx. 2000 per year to approximately 200 per year.

## Social care services

People with disabilities and Roma<sup>1</sup> are informed on their rights and entitlements to social services, and are encouraged to participate in public consultation mechanisms and advocacy;

43 families in the Municipality of Lezhë, particularly Roma, who are also faced with some form of vulnerability, were assisted with small income generation schemes in an effort to start up some form of economic activity to sustain their livelihood.

300 school children from at least 190 families from the Roma community, were supported to return to school and pursue their education through an inclusive package of integrated social services, despite the families' scarce financial means.

The mothers and families of at least 166 children with special needs, were for the first time offered specialised support with their children's special needs. For most mothers of these children, this meant, being able for the first time to not only offer their children the kind of assistance they needed, but also, to be able to tend to other important personal family matters if only for a couple of hours, by sharing the caring responsibility with trained specialists.

School children in seven municipalities, and teachers alike, are now more knowledgeable in matters of inclusive education and facilitating the return of school children from vulnerable communities to school.

## Local economic development

Local businesses operating in the field of tourism increased exposure to tourism demand and improved promotion through the online platform of [www.visit-gjirokastra.com](http://www.visit-gjirokastra.com).

Tourists wishing to visit the region of Gjirokastrë are exposed to a wealth of up-to-date information making their planning and communication with prospective hosts easier.



## INSTITUTIONS

### Solid waste management

From a fragmented, ad hoc approach to solid waste service delivery, all supported municipalities have reengineered their service delivery and have clear processes in place from planning, budgeting, service delivery and monitoring.

18 municipalities managed to develop and implement Local Integrated Waste Management Plans in compliance with legal requirements. 7 out of 18 municipalities, started providing the Solid Waste Management services for the first time.

Municipal staff have improved knowhow and capacities in aspects of planning of municipal solid waste management, cost and tariff calculation, performance based implementation and monitoring. Municipalities prioritised and implemented their infrastructure improvements based on their Local Integrated Waste Management Plans. In this process, municipalities made use of Swiss support to co-finance priority investments with significant impact on service improvement.

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1. For the sake of brevity in this document under Roma we include Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali (there are very few Ashkali in Albania). 1% of the overall population is vulnerable Roma with striking social inclusion needs.

Following several years of work, some municipalities, as is the case of Shkodër, have managed to cover the service cost almost entirely through the tariff (95%-100%), as opposed to the initial baseline (65%).

Following the territorial administrative reform, municipalities have managed to extend their service to areas previously uncovered by service, as is the case of the Municipality of Dibër, currently covering 57% as opposed to 24% of the territory in 2008.

Having mastered the *plan-budget-manage* approach, some municipalities, as is the case of the Municipality of Shkodër have naturally evolved to considering electronic monitoring of the solid waste management service.

### **Water supply and sewage**

There has been a paradigm shift in the way a municipality perceives and deals with the water utility company. From treating it as a municipal enterprise, where cost and benefits were internalised within the municipal operations, now the water utility operates as a self-sustainable company with autonomous decision-making driven by efficiency and customer satisfaction.

The Water Utility of Lezhë successfully managed and maintained a mindset shift among its management in the way the water supply and sewage service was managed, moving towards a customer oriented and self-financing service provider. Command and control has been replaced by performance-based management. As a result, committed management ensured a timely and qualitative implementation of capacity development measures along with investments for the rehabilitation of drinking water network in the city centre of Lezhë.

Unlike most Water Utilities in the country, the Water Utility of Lezhë has managed to provide uninterrupted 24 hour water supply to over 55,000 inhabitants. To date, there have been uninterrupted service for 1500 days.

Capacities of the Water Utility of Lezhë improved in aspects of service planning, costing, implementing, conducting of feasibility studies, and other aspects related to performance monitoring.

The Water Utility of Lezhë reduced water (mis)usage by at least 64% (from 240l of daily water consumption/person to 85l), by decreasing non-revenue water supply and consumption occurring through informal connections to the main system.

### **Social care services**

Municipalities were, for the first time, in a position to start offering social care services as foreseen by law, beyond the usual cash-pay-out-only practice.

Social Care Plans were developed through participatory approach in 16 municipalities, of which 8 approved by the Municipal Councils and currently under implementation.

Municipal staff (839/16) were supported in the process of acquiring the necessary knowhow foundations essential for the planning and implementation of the new social care legislation and policy, and social services provision.

Partnerships between local civil society actors and municipalities were established to ensure that the necessary capacities and services are provided to the target groups in need of social care services.

### Local economic development

The municipalities in the *qark* of Gjirokaštër, have improved coordination and dialogue with the business community operating in the field of tourism.

Municipalities in the *qark* of Gjirokaštër engaged in “translating” and operationalising tourism ambitions particularly in culture, heritage and nature tourism.



## NATIONAL

### Solid waste management

In the case of solid waste management, contribution to policy-making has been particularly valuable in enabling the government to review the regulatory framework concerning service cost calculation, landfills and dumpsite rehabilitation, in order for all local government units to have a standardised approach to the management of solid waste. In addition, best practices, particularly concerning recycling and rehabilitation of dump-sites, have gained national recognition.

### Water supply and sewage

The success of the Lezhë Water Utility Enterprise, inspired the government of Albania to launch a far-reaching water sector reform that includes a scheme to award performance improvements of water utilities with financing of investment measures from Albanian state budget across the country. This reform was launched at the end of 2017 and produced significant results from the outset.

Improved performance of the Water Utility of Lezhë, which was ranked as the top performer during 2019 according to the last year’s annual report of the Agency for Water Supply, Sewage and Waste Management Infrastructure as well as improved services of water supply and sewage, is the basis for sustainable growth and social prosperity.

### Social care services

The work targeting the system level, by leading a policy dialogue with competent authorities, by strengthening the capacities of services in all 61 municipalities, and by testing and scaling-up good practices, has the potential to contribute to the overall improvement of social inclusion in the whole country.

The work done on the social care services on a local level, across at least 19 municipalities, provided direct feedback on the implementation of the new on social care services.

In addition, direct contribution was provided to the process of new legislation drafted, concerning various aspects of the social care services, including the establishment and operationalisation of the social fund, all of which expected to facilitate the provision of social care services locally.

### Local economic development

Tourism development constitutes a national development priority for Albania. In this context, the work done in the *qark* of Gjirokaštër for the development of the tourism sector through increased public-private cooperation, constitutes a good showcase for all other municipalities with high tourism potential to follow. In addition, the work done in the *qark* of Gjirokaštër, made it possible to demonstrate at a local level how the policy objective no.5 of the national strategy on the sustainable development of tourism 2019-2023 can be implemented locally.

## LESSONS LEARNT



### CITIZENS

#### **Solid waste management**

Independently of where people live (in urban or rural areas), they are entitled to living in a clean environment, meaning solid waste management ought to be offered to all citizens.

Citizens who are informed on the service delivery process and its benefits are more willing to pay the tariff. Hence, increased communication with the community may prove helpful in expanding the base of tariff/tax payers, as was the case of the increase by 15.2% in 2018.

Public awareness and education are long term processes and difficult to be dealt with within a project mandate. However, they are considered instrumental and can be explored more. In the case of the Municipality of Dibër, awareness campaigns have proved helpful in explaining to the local community how the service delivery works, and what the benefits are as a way to extend the service and get people pay for the service.

#### **Water supply and sewage**

Local communities are willing to review and change their behaviour at the prospect of improved, lasting alternatives (the case of water supply through informal connections to the network as opposed to the improved, 24h water supply).

The water utility company has not increased the tariff, showing that improvement of cost recovery should not be sought only through tariff increase, but by improving company efficiency. As such, the case of the improved Water Supply in Lezhë, shows that people when they see that the company constantly improves the service they are also willing to pay regularly and be part of the overall service improvement process.

#### **Social care services**

Provision of social services by local governments is not only a new function, but it also constitutes a major shift from the traditional cash-based support. Through the interventions so far, municipalities, service providers and beneficiaries are exploring how they could work together to ensure that new services can indeed be designed and implemented to target people that otherwise will be excluded. Yet, considering different development challenges and resource shortage, local governments face, it is important for government and other development actors to continue their support so that the services initiated are not compromised by other more vocal, pressing needs.

#### **Local economic development**

Individualistic approach has been the norm and approach for many years in the business sector, but such an approach can hamper development. Local business communities operating in the tourism sector especially, as in the case of the qark of Gjirokastër, will have to (increasingly) open to public-private, private-private partnerships and similar collaboration models.



## INSTITUTIONS

### Solid waste management

Post TAR Municipalities, making use of the acquired knowledge, have rapidly expanded solid waste services into territories previously not served. Yet, expansion of service poses financial constraints for the municipality because the expansion of the service is not associated immediately with tariff payment, both a financial and cultural challenge. So, while in overall the municipalities are putting extra efforts in improving their service, the aggregated figures might create a distorted reality, hence there will be need to interpret them based on the specificities of each local context.

Through the intervention a community of knowledge was created through the *Centre of Competences*, the challenge remains how this community of knowledge sustains and keeps the exchange going, particularly in territories where there is no follow-up support.

The intervention on improving solid waste service has been long-term and has involved different administrations and leaderships (before and after TAR). Throughout the process and cooperation with different local governments, the role “change agents” have played in adopting and sustaining the new methods locally, became evident. This reiterates the importance of identifying such agents from the outset of the intervention and sustaining them along the way.

### Water supply and sewage

Commitment and ownership of the municipality, the Water Utility Enterprise director as well as cooperation and support from the Municipality of Lezhë and the local community, proved essential to the success.

Working together with the local actors to identify and set achievable and realistic performance milestones helped produce context specific achievable milestones.

Identification of a *local champion* - as was the case of top management in the Water Utility Enterprise of Lezhë, and continuity helps push the project forward, and creates ownership from the start (not necessarily when the project phases out).

Close cooperation at all levels proved essential to the successful implementation: including intra-institutional - within the enterprise itself, and inter-organisational - between the enterprise and the financing parties.

### Social care services

Social services is a recent function for local governments and it re-dimensions municipal services. At the same time, it is important to note that there are many challenges which municipalities are faced with, and maintaining the balance is yet another challenge in itself.

The shift in mindset and practice in the way the service is offered will need further support in capacities and investment to make it possible for municipalities to offer this service effectively in the long-term.

Sustainability however, will remain an issue unless the municipalities develop the capacities to tap into the Social Fund, and the latter matches the actual needs.

## Local economic development

Flexibility and adaptation were essential to support sustainable partnership building: certain actors, such as the case of the local actors including the Municipality of Gjirokastër, did assume the role, but not necessarily in the way the intervention had anticipated it.



## NATIONAL

### Solid waste management

The law for the integrated solid waste management, exceeds the possibilities of the Albanian context and the challenge is how to bridge local realities with national/EU ambitions.

The need for improving solid waste management service country-wide is considerable both in terms of infrastructure and technical capacities. While Swiss support has generated significant knowledge and has induced more donor support, the challenge remains for the central and local government to work together in stepping up their efforts to ensure the necessary technical and financial instruments to comply with new legislation.

Continued institutional oversight from the Swiss Embassy proved very useful as not only reinforced Swiss commitment, but also served as a sounding board for local actors.

### Water supply and sewage

Close cooperation at all levels proved essential to the successful implementation: including intra-institutional within the enterprise itself, and inter-organisational between the enterprise and the financing parties, and as such, it should be encouraged and supported in future interventions.

### Social care services

Municipalities offering social care services in a comprehensive manner, constitutes a new reality for them, made harder by the limited resources, capacities and finances. Improved mechanisms and practices that improve the municipalities' chances of tapping into financing mechanisms, such as the social fund, are needed.

In addition, nationwide initiatives that address the gap in capacities and human resources specialised in social care services locally, including all the different disciplines, such as logopedists, etc., are necessary.

### Local economic development

Demand driven initiatives have proved the right entry point for sustainable tourism development that leads to job creation.

Initiatives seeking to establish and operationalise destination management organisations require continued support. Although by law, municipalities are required to support business growth, clearer instruments are needed in place for the operationalisation of the strategy and law on tourism, at a local level.

## 3.1

## SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

**Challenge**

The support tackled the problem of poor service delivery in urban and rural areas, both in terms of capacities to plan and manage the service and in terms of infrastructure (*collection, transportation and disposal*). Additional challenges, particularly following the territorial administrative reform, concern the territorial coverage in expanded territories with low density and access, lack of standards, etc.

**Approach**

The approach adopted by the project for the Solid Waste Management has been that of **strengthening governance** and **combining know-how** with small financial support, with the ultimate aim to improve the services. The support provided on a local level (bottom-up), sought to produce products/practices that would influence national regulations.

**Results**

*On a citizen level:*

- Citizens in 7 municipalities, especially those living in rural remote areas of Shkodër and Dibër municipalities, away from the urban centre of the municipality, were for the first time provided with the service of solid waste management, estimated at app. 172,000 persons. In addition, knowhow on composting and other means to reduce waste were shared with the local communities in 18 municipalities.
- Following several years of work, the number of citizens paying the service tariff increased, resulting in some municipalities, as is the case of Shkodër, managing to cover the service cost almost entirely through the tariff (95%-100%), as opposed to the initial baseline (65%).
- An increased number of citizens gained access to the service, as municipalities managed to extend their service to areas previously uncovered by service, as is the case of the Municipality of Dibër, currently covering 57% as opposed to 24% of the territory in 2008.

*On an institutional level:*

- From a fragmented, ad hoc approach to solid waste service delivery, all supported municipalities have reengineered their service delivery and have clear process in place from planning, budgeting, service delivery and monitoring.
- 18 municipalities managed to develop and implement Local Integrated Waste Management Plans in compliance with legal requirements. 7 out of 18 municipalities, started providing the solid waste management services for the first time.
- Municipal staff have improved knowhow and capacities in aspects of planning of municipal solid waste management, cost and tariff calculation, performance based implementation and monitoring.
- Municipalities prioritised and implemented their infrastructure improvements based on their Local Integrated Waste Management Plans. In this process, municipalities made use of Swiss support to co-finance priority investments with significant impact on service improvement.

- Having mastered the plan-budget-manage approach, some municipalities, as is the case of the Municipality of Shkodër have naturally evolved to considering electronic monitoring of the solid waste management service.

*On a national policy level:*

- In the case of solid waste management, contribution to policy-making has been particularly valuable in enabling the government to review the regulatory framework concerning service cost calculation, landfills and dumpsite rehabilitation, in order for all local government units to have a standardised approach to the management of solid waste. In addition, best practices, particularly concerning recycling and rehabilitation of dump-sites, have gained national recognition.
- Curricula for the full cycle of solid waste management is integrated in the training programs of the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA).

### **Lessons learnt**

- The law for the integrated solid waste management, exceeds the possibilities of the Albanian context and the challenge is how to bridge local realities with national/EU ambitions.
- The need for improving Solid Waste Management service country-wide is considerable both in term of infrastructure and technical capacities. While Swiss support has generated significant knowledge and has induced more donors support, the challenge remains for the central and local government to work together in stepping up their efforts ensure the necessary technical and financial instruments to comply with new legislation.

## 3.2

### PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

#### Challenge

The key problem in focus was that of poor budgeting and planning capacities/practices, which in turn lead to discrepancies between the two, short term and *ad hoc* decision and lack of transparency. Additional issues addressed included: lack of strategic development planning capacities and experiences.

#### Approach

The approach adopted was that of shifting from *ad hoc* to medium term budgeting, by linking municipal development strategies with medium term budgeting programs. Making the changes systemic and long term.

#### Results

*On an institutional level:*

- A shift in the institutional mindset in public finance management: Municipalities were introduced to the concept of strategic planning and assisted with knowhow and capacity development to shift from poor short term budgeting and planning practices to medium-term budget programs and strategic development plans. Municipal capacities were developed in aspects of annual budget preparation, execution and monitoring, long/medium-term strategic and financial planning, performance budgeting, etc. In more specific terms, 29 municipalities managed to develop their own participatory development strategies and financial planning documents.
- Such shift, changed the way municipalities prioritised capital investments as well as strengthened the fiscal discipline and lowered municipal debts, resulting in municipalities such as Shkodër, to having no more debts.
- Instead of the sole responsibility and product of the finance department, the municipal budgeting process now is cross departmental and driven by strategic priorities, clear objectives and performance indicators. To this end, in addition to being representative, inclusive and transparent, the budget also serves as a monitoring instrument for management.
- Municipalities developed structured opportunities to discuss with their local constituencies on budgeting needs and priorities, in the form of participatory budgeting practices, sometimes boosted through the use of the Smart Budget Transparency tool. It is worth noting that participation and representation of women in the budget consultations has significantly increased, progressing from consultations being held separately, to consultation processes being held jointly.

*On a national policy level:*

- The project's influence on policymaking relates primarily to the contribution it provided to the drafting of the new law on public finances and its sublegal acts.
- In addition to the contribution on a policymaking level, the impact on local level includes: higher transparency and more inclusive budgets (because of the consultations/participatory approach), lowering of municipal debts (or no-complete debt repayment as is the case of the Municipality of Shkodër).

## Lessons learnt

- While development projects are transformative by nature, it remains a challenge how to support municipalities with their needs and find the right way and entry point to induce change that enables them to move into a new frontier in line with national policies and EU requirements. Performance based budgeting was a logical step to deepen systemic changes and make municipalities work on a performance-based approach. Hence, the readiness of local government (culturally and technically) in the context when this principle is not yet adopted at central level might affect the final result.
- Seemingly, adopting and embedding strategic planning and budgetary practices into municipal operations varies among municipalities reflecting their capacities and leadership commitment. As such, from a development intervention perspective, it remains a challenge how to balance between showcasing success stories and streamlining new practices across municipalities based on a well-established regulatory framework to be provided by the government.

### 3.3

## ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES THROUGH ONE STOP SHOPS

### Challenge

The problem at the core of the intervention concerned limited coverage of municipal service delivery, limited access to services, high response time, poor transparency in service provision management, poor monitoring of administrative service provision, etc.

In the process, basic municipal functions were identified and subsequently converted into services. In addition, the project worked on developing informative modules for the local communities, as well as, on establishing the standards for the official municipal webpages. In 2014, the project contributed to the preparation process of the Digital Agenda of Albania 2014-2020 with concrete recommendations on the local e-government chapter. In 2016, recommendations on local government services were also provided as part of the drafting process of the law on delivery of public services. By 2017, the integrated One Stop Shop model was implemented in five municipalities, namely: Shkodër, Lezhë, Vau i Dejës, Mat and Klos. A total of 109 services have been digitalised.

Of all cases, the OSSH in the Municipality of Shkodër, is the only one connected to all its comprising Administrative Units, catering for over 16,000 families.

### Approach

The approach adopted was that of pilot One Stop Shops for administrative municipal services. Following the findings from Pilot interventions lessons learned were shared at national level.

### Results

*On a citizen level:*

- The establishment of the One Stop Shops proved an instrumental step in achieving important tangible results on a citizen level. The citizens, of whom a good part, living in the highly fragmented, remote and mountainous areas of five northern Albania municipalities, gained (for the first time) access to a varied range of 109 municipal services.
- About 83% of these citizens, who live in the peripheral areas of the municipalities (Shkodër, Lezhë, Vau i Dejës, Mat and Klos) spend significantly reduced time at the administrative unit (centres), to acquire the services they need.
- Citizens from 10 administrative units in the municipality of Shkodër, amounting to over 16,000 households, are all equally connected to the municipality, as all 9 One Stop Shops operating on an administrative unit level, are connected to the main one.
- Provision of a significant range of municipal administrative services through the One Stop Shops, has resulted in citizens being less exposed to corruptive practices. Reduced exposure to different offices to acquire different services, has resulted in citizens receiving their required administrative services, in an increasingly transparent, qualitative manner.

*On an institutional level:*

- Five municipalities in Northern Albania, including Shkodër, Lezhë, Vau i Dejës, Mat and Klos, reengineered the practice of managing and delivering administrative services to its urban and rural core, by digitalising 109 services and making them available through the One Stop Shops.

- The provision of administrative services through the One Stop Shops, reduced the interface and exchange between various municipal administration/offices and citizens, concentrating it primarily on the OSSH front-desk. This shift resulted in higher efficiency and effectiveness of work processes - marking a 2-fold increase in municipal revenues (from both citizens and businesses) in the Municipality of Shkodër. Very importantly, this shift led to lesser opportunities for corruptive practices to take place.
- Currently, Shkodër is the only municipality following the Territorial Administrative Reform that has managed to connect all its administrative units with an integrated One Stop Shop service. Through the digitalisation and provision of services through the One Stop Shops management at a municipal level, it improved their performance monitoring practices.
- The establishment of One Stop Shops streamlined the provision of administrative services provision, enabling municipal administrative staff to make more efficient and qualitative use of time at their disposal: instead of having to personally meet all citizens approaching with a query, administrative staff can focus on a multitude of tasks, which in turn is more beneficial to the institution/local community.

*On a national policy level:*

- The project contributed with recommendations to the preparation process of the Digital Agenda of Albania 2014-2020 with concrete recommendations on the local e-government chapter, and to the drafting process of the law on delivery of public services.
- The initially implemented OSSH concept, provided a good starting point for the stock-taking of the municipal services;

### **Lessons learnt**

- In countries like Albania where many services and processes are developed from the ground up, the use of Information Technology (IT) offers great opportunities to transform and introduce services that were not provided before. For this to happen, in an efficient and effective way, it is important that investment in qualitative IT, is also matched by qualified staff, supportive processes and administrative structures, and institutional commitment to maintaining and financially supporting this service overtime.
- Use of Technology can be easily hampered by technical and cultural bottlenecks. It is important for strong leadership to sustain change until the results are achieved in full and both local administration and citizens experience the benefits of new technology.

## 3.4

### WOMEN IN POLITICS NETWORK

#### Challenge

The Women in Politics Network (WiPN) tackled the problem of low women engagement and low representation in politics, primarily focusing on a local government level, the impeding mentality regarding gender roles in society, and subsequently low focus on pressing issues affecting women voters – particularly those in underprivileged circumstances. Lack of partnerships and cross-party alliances among women in politics operating on different levels, was also tackled by the WiPN.

#### Approach

The approach of the WiPN was to empower the engagement and representation of women in municipal councils and foster cross-party alliances.

#### Results

*On an institutional level:*

- The Women in Politics Network (WiPN) was successful in bringing together Women Councillors and establishing 33 local alliances country-wide from across the political spectrum, in advocating on pressing local issues affecting women, in the municipalities of Tiranë, Lezhë, Vlorë, Fier, Mat, Korçë, Shkodër, Klos, Durrës, Elbasan, Cërrik, Lushnje, Malësi e Madhe, Kukës, Has and Tropojë, etc.
- In the process, the WiPN made public resources and politics on a local level gender sensitive, supporting significant increase of women engaged in politics and improved policymaking, from 12% to 35%, in line with the 2015 Electoral Code provisions of 50% quota for women.
- The work of local alliances, resulted in a number of concrete successful interventions locally, focusing on a variety of social inclusion issues affecting women, including: financial support to women entrepreneurs in setting up businesses (Municipality of Tirana), successful advocacy for reductions or waving of specific taxes and tariffs for (single mother) women head of households (in the Municipalities of Shkodër, Klos, Mat, Fier, etc.), making the city more accessible for mothers and children as well as for people with mobility impairment through construction of 90 ramps in the city of Lezhë, establishment of the Gender Equality Commissions (in the Municipalities of Durrës, Elbasan), support with social care services to women victims of domestic violence (Municipality of Korçë), support to women attending vocational training courses in the Municipality of Vlorë, etc.

*On a national policy level:*

- The Network recommendations for the new legal framework on local self-government and local finances, imposed the setup of strategic gender quota issues: 30% of municipality and community structures are women; 30% of programme management teams should be women; the Mid-Term Budget Planning should include the objective of gender balance.

#### Lessons learnt

- While it is important to increase the awareness for the role of women in local politics and demonstrate what increased women engagement in politics can do, the challenge remains on how to balance spontaneous initiatives with long term change based on genuine demand and ownership by women.

- Women engaged in local politics, reaching out to women in their respective local constituencies on matters of particular concern for women, increases their legitimacy as representative power figures on a local level, and increases trust.

### Challenge

The problem tackled by *the intervention* was multiple: the lack of reliable drinking water supply in place, outdated/ailing infrastructure was outdated and ailing, high water losses, illegal connections to the transmission lines and distribution network, unaccounted for water consumption, inability to cover own operating costs, low access to sanitation, etc. Challenges addressed on an institutional level included: poor planning and implementation practices, low performance in service delivery, high losses due to informal connections to the network, etc.

### Approach

The program applied a performance-based approach for the first time in Albania: Project advance and implementation of measures was subject to the achievement of agreed performance milestones by the utility (e.g. *tariff adjustments, elaboration of business plan, increase of direct operation cost coverage*).

### Results

*On a citizen level:*

- A local community of app. 55,000 citizens in the city of Lezhë gained access to safe, reliable, quality and affordable water and sewage services during 24 hours/day, compared to an average of 12 hrs/day in 2010.
- The support improved the services of water supply and sewage for the citizens including the outskirts of the city of Lezhë, where under-privileged people from rural mountainous villages were settled during the transition period of 1992-2017.
- Overall, citizens receive a more qualitative water supply and sewage service, less prone to informal connections to the main water supply system.
- Consumer satisfaction was increased by at least 50% as complaints were reduced from 2000 per year to approx. 200 per year.

*On an institutional level:*

- There has been a paradigm shift in the way a municipality perceives and deals with the water utility company. From treating it as a municipal enterprise, where cost and benefits were internalised within the municipal operations, now the water utility operates as a self-sustainable company with autonomous decision-making driven by efficiency and customer satisfaction.
- The Water Utility of Lezhë successfully managed and maintained a mindset shift among its management in the way the water supply and sewage service was managed, moving towards a customer oriented and self-financing service provider. Command and control has been replaced by performance-based management. As a result, committed management ensured a timely and qualitative implementation of capacity development measures along with investments for the rehabilitation of drinking water network in the city centre of Lezhë.
- Unlike most Water Utilities in the country, the Water Utility of Lezhë has managed to provide uninterrupted 24 hour water supply to over 55,000 inhabitants. To date, there have been uninterrupted service for 1500 days.

- Capacities of the Water Utility of Lezhë improved in aspects of service planning, costing, implementing, conducting of feasibility studies, and other aspects related to performance monitoring.
- The Water Utility of Lezhë reduced water (miss)usage by at least 64% (from 240l of daily water consumption/person to 85l), by decreasing non-revenue water supply and consumption occurring through informal connections to the main system.

*On a national policy level:*

- The success of the Lezhë Water Utility Enterprise, inspired the government of Albania to launch a far-reaching water sector reform that includes a scheme to award performance improvements of water utilities with financing of investment measures from Albanian state budget across the country. This reform was launched at the end of 2017 and produced significant results from the outset.
- Improved performance of Water Utility of Lezhë, which was ranked as the top performer during 2019, according to the last year's annual report of the Agency for Water Supply, Sewage and Waste Management Infrastructure as well as improved services of water supply and sewage are the basis for sustainable growth and social prosperity.

### Lessons learnt

- Local communities are willing to review and change their behaviour at the prospect of improved, lasting alternatives (the case of water supply through informal connections to the network as opposed to the improved, 24h (uninterrupted) water supply).
- The water utility company has not increased the tariff, showing that improvement of cost recovery should not be sought only through tariff increase, but by improving company efficiency. As such, the case of the improved water supply in Lezhë, shows that people when they see that the company constantly improves the service they are also willing to pay regularly and be part of the overall service improvement process.
- Commitment and ownership of the municipality, the Water Utility Enterprise director as well as cooperation and support from the Municipality of Lezhë and local community, proved essential to the success.
- Working together with the local actors to identify and set achievable and realistic performance milestones helped produce context specific achievable milestones.
- Identification of a local champion - as was the case of top management in the Water Utility Enterprise of Lezhë, and continuity helps push the project forward, and create ownership from the start (not necessarily when the project phases out).
- Close cooperation at all levels proved essential to the successful implementation: including intra-institutional - within the enterprise itself, and inter-organisational - between the enterprise and the financing parties, and as such, it should be encouraged and supported in future interventions.
- Continued institutional support from the Swiss Embassy proved very useful as not only reinforced Swiss commitment, but also served as a sounding board for local actors.

## 3.6

### SOCIAL CARE SERVICES TO LEAVE NONE BEHIND

#### Challenge

The program supported by the Swiss government, and jointly implemented by four other partner agencies, tackles the problem of social services delivery as a new local governance competence, and the need to shift from cash-based only social services (social benefits) to an integrated, comprehensive approach to social services. Challenges addressed include: lack of capacities among municipalities, lack physical infrastructure, lack of community development centres, no prior social care service plans, etc.

#### Approach

The intervention adopted a multi-actor approach, having numerous donors and local level actors joining forces in making service delivery possible.

The approach was to provide these services on a local level, and to support municipalities in the process of delivering them. Given that this constituted a new function, and that the municipalities did not have the capacities required, the approach was to offer back-up through the local organisations, as in the case of the Municipality of Dibër, or Lezhë.

In addition, it is worth noting that the intervention adopted a comprehensive approach: service planning and management; direct investment in infrastructure for new centres; capacity building; support to all family members to inform, capacitate, and enable them to commit to some form of economic activity.

#### Results

*On a citizen level:*

- People with disabilities and Roma are informed on their rights and entitlements to social services, and are encouraged to participate in public consultation mechanisms and advocacy;
- 43 families in the Municipality of Lezhë, particularly from the Roma community, who are also faced with some form of vulnerability, were assisted with small income generation schemes in an effort to start up some form of economic activity to sustain their livelihood.
- 300 school children from at least 190 families from the Roma community, were supported to return to school and pursue their education through an inclusive package of integrated social services, despite the families' scarce financial means.
- Individuals from vulnerable communities (app.30), including Roma community and single mothers, were supported in the process of starting employment. Such support helped these individuals and the families reliant on them, get back on their feet again.
- The mothers and families of at least 166 children with special needs, were for the first time offered specialised support with their children's special needs.

*On an institutional level:*

- Municipalities were, for the first time, in a position to start offering social care services as foreseen by law, beyond the usual cash-pay-out-only practice. Social Care Plans were developed through participatory approach in 16 municipalities.

- Municipal staff (839/16) were supported in the process of acquiring the necessary knowhow foundations essential for the planning and implementation of the new social care legislation and policy, and social services provision.
- Partnerships between local civil society actors and municipalities were established to ensure that the necessary capacities and services are provided to the target groups in need of social care services.

*On a national policy level:*

- The work targeting the system level, by leading a policy dialogue with competent authorities, by strengthening the capacities of services in all 61 municipalities, and by testing and scaling-up good practices, has the potential to contribute to the overall improvement of social inclusion in the whole country.
- The work done on the social care services on a local level, across at least 11 municipalities, provided direct feedback on the implementation of the new law on social care services in the Republic of Albania.
- In addition, direct contribution was provided to the process of new legislation drafted, concerning various aspects of the social care services, including the establishment and operationalisation of the social fund, all of which expected to facilitate the provision of social care services locally.

### **Lessons learnt**

- Provision of social services by local governments is not only a new function, but it also constitutes a major shift from the traditional cash-based support. Through the interventions so far, municipalities, service providers and beneficiaries are exploring how they could work together to ensure that new services can indeed be designed and implemented to target people that otherwise will be excluded. Yet, considering different development challenges and resource shortage local governments face, it is important for government and other development actors to continue their support so that the services initiated are not compromised by other pressing more vocal needs.
- Social services is a recent function for local governments and it re-dimensions municipal services. At the same time, it is important to note that there are many challenges with which municipalities are faced, and maintaining the balance is yet another challenge in itself.
- The shift in mindset and practice in the way the service is offered will need further support in capacities and investment to make it possible for municipalities to offer this service effectively in the long-term.
- Sustainability however, will remain an issue unless the municipalities develop the capacities to tap into the Social Fund, and the latter matches the actual needs.
- Municipalities offering social care services in a comprehensive manner, constitutes a new reality for them, made harder by the limited resources, capacities and finances. Improved mechanisms and practices that improve the municipalities' chances of tapping into financing mechanisms, such as the social fund, are needed.

### 3.7

## LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH JOB CREATION BASED ON PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

### Challenge

The intervention in the tourism sector in the *qark* of Gjirokastra focused on tackling lack of coordination and development vision among the various actors operating in the field of tourism, in an area with very high tourism development potential. In cooperation with the seven municipalities in the *qark* of Gjirokastër, and the local business community (operating in hospitality and other tourism related activities), the need for an effective public private coordination and concrete steps towards to the promotion of Gjirokastra was also identified and tackled.

### Approach

The intervention adopted the approach of *public-private partnerships* to drive a process of coordination among the municipality and local business community and encourage their organisation into a *planning and managing entity* that would plan and oversee the process of tourism destination development and management.

In the process, the intervention also adopted a bottom-up approach by encouraging the local businesses to go formal and benefit from the newly established online platform and newly formed association.

### Results

*On a citizen level:*

- Local businesses operating in the field of tourism increased exposure to tourism demand and improved promotion through the online platform of [www.visit-gjirokastra.com](http://www.visit-gjirokastra.com).
- Tourists wishing to visit the region of Gjirokastër are exposed to a wealth of up-to-date information making their planning and communication with prospective hosts easier.

*On an institutional level:*

- The municipalities in the *qark* of Gjirokastër, have improved coordination and dialogue with the business community operating in the field of tourism.
- Municipalities in the *qark* of Gjirokastër engaged in “translating” and operationalising tourism ambitions particularly in culture, heritage and nature tourism.

*On a national policy level:*

- Tourism development constitutes a national development priority for Albania. In this context, the work done in the *qark* of Gjirokastër for the development of the tourism sector through increased public-private cooperation, constitutes a good showcase for all other municipalities with high tourism potential to follow. In addition, the work done in the *qark* of Gjirokastër, made it possible to demonstrate at a local level how the policy objective no.5 of the national strategy on the sustainable development of tourism 2019-2023 can be implemented locally.

## Lessons learnt

- Individualistic approach has been the norm and approach for many years in the business sector, but such an approach can hamper development. Local business communities operating in the tourism sector especially, as in the case of the *qark* of Gjirokastër, will have to (increasingly) open to public-private, private-private partnerships and similar collaboration models.
- Flexibility and adaptation were essential to support sustainable partnership building: certain actors, such as the case of the local actors including the Municipality of Gjirokastër, did assume the role, but not necessarily in the way the intervention had anticipated it.
- Demand driven initiatives have proved the right entry point for sustainable tourism development that leads to job creation.
- Initiatives seeking to establish and operationalise destination management organisations require continued support. Although by law, municipalities are required to support business growth, clearer instruments are needed in place for the operationalisation of the strategy and law on tourism, at a local level.

### Challenge

Switzerland tackled in partnership with Council of Europe public administration reforming on a local level, lack of standardised practices and integral platforms on Human Resource Management practices; lack of up-to-date information on local administration and various aspects related to it.

### Approach

Building a modern and effective Human Resource Management online platform for the three levels of public administration (central, local and independent institutions) and standards pertaining to local government units, while strengthening the capacities and performance of responsible authorities at central and local level.

### Results

- The work with Department of Public Administration to develop integrated communication platforms for the public administration now *www.administrata.al*, is a product of several years of work that allows local governments to adopt the same Human Resource Management practices as those on a central level. The platform enables local governments to shift toward modern human resource management (HRM) techniques, through transparent and simplified recruitment management and vacancy planning processes.
- Municipalities, and HRM staff in particular, were introduced to a new culture of communication through Information and Communication Technology internally, and among relevant counterparts at central and local level.
- The use of the platform(s) has demonstrated decreased political bias and pressure on local officials when it comes to recruitment processes, increasing the chances of merit recruitment in the public administration.
- Key strategic decision-making in municipalities, is evidence-informed (and more transparent) as it is based on real time data and key performance indicators.
- For big municipalities, i.e. the Municipality of Tirana the use of the platform(s) has been instrumental to producing real time reports and updated information on the main indicators of the HRM such as recruitment, dismissals, promotions, court cases etc.
- While facilitating the work of the local level institutions, the new platform *administrata.al* enables the Commissioner for the Oversight of Civil Service to have timely access and monitor HRM practices, and the Department of Public Administration is enabled to prepare accurate and timely reports on public administration reform as part of EU progress report for Albania.

### Lessons learnt

- Developing the portal *administrata.al* was a learning curve, meaning not all efforts to provide an integral solution have delivered on first attempt. While Swiss flexible approach made possible to develop an integrated platform, the ultimate success will depend on the commitment of the institution to mitigate cultural, human and administrative barriers so that various platforms are integrated into one, which is used in full by all local governments.

- Human Resource Management practices entail both cultural change and pressure on the administration for new skills and knowhow, almost an alibi to discontinue it. There is therefore, a great need for leadership and proper legal frameworks to enforce its application.
- Public Administration Reform is a high priority as part of the EU integration process. Responding to such high priority entails that EU integration process will sustain positive pressure to implement the reform in full also at local level.

### Challenge

The Swiss have supported Albania's efforts to strengthen its local democracy, decentralise power from the central authorities to local government units, to ultimately support Albania in its EU integration process. Although Albania developed a local government system based on the European Charter of Local Self Government (1998), actors involved realised that decentralization process that started in 2000 had to be revisited. In 2014 the Albanian Government put in motion the Territorial Administrative Reform (TAR). While for the government and other actors involved it was important that TAR addresses inefficiencies due to the fragmentation it was equally important that the reform deepened both functional and fiscal decentralization. Indeed, given Albania's candidate country status of the European Union, full compliance with the Copenhagen criteria is required, meaning further decentralisation of public administration and reinforcement of the capacities of both local administration and local elected representatives.

### Approach

From the outset, the Swiss support to the reform of TAR adopted a multi layer – multi actor perspective on two levels:

- It helped in the shaping of the reform/discussion whilst many interests were at stake, by offering technical knowhow to feed the discussion on the territorial administrative reform; and very importantly, by creating synergies with other ongoing initiatives, and making use of its other ongoing projects.
- It built alliances with other development partners and projects, and became part of the multi-donor funded initiatives to support the government in implementing the reform.

Throughout the support, it maintained a flexible approach to respond to a priority need, in a timely, open manner, and supported independent alternatives to enrich the actors perspectives.

### Results

- Over the years, the Swiss have provided hands on support to deepen the decentralization process in Albania. The Territorial Administrative Reform initiated by the Government of Albania in 2014 was an important milestone for deepening and consolidating the decentralization process. Albania for the first time has created a comprehensive and adequate social inclusion and protection policy framework in line with the country decentralization agenda and the introduction of new competencies including social services at the municipal level. As the reform entailed political decision making for both territorial amalgamation as well as functional and fiscal decentralization for Swiss it was important to both provide timely support as well as allow for multi-stakeholder informed policy making. As such they employed an integral, multi-layer / multi-actor approach, to contribute directly to the reform process through:
- making use of existing projects to provide technical knowhow which policy relevant actors could use to discuss the depth and scope of the territorial administrative reform,
- supporting of alternative non-state actors to become a proactive part of the process and add to the plurality of the discussions on how consolidation at local level could take place collaborating with other donors to coordinate and align resources for supporting the government in legislative changes, taking part in the multi donor funded project Support for Territorial Administrative Reform to support the government with the implementation of the reform.

- During the policy formulation stage, key stakeholders were provided with “the study for the functional area”, used for the agglomeration by the government; further, to diversify perspectives, a nongovernmental organization was supported to develop an alternative proposal for the agglomeration. Although, the focus of the reform was only at the first level of local government, a proposal for regionalization and reforming of the second level of local government was put forward for discussion.
- National actors and local elected representatives were convened into a ‘Consultative Council’ - a formal platform for increased political dialogue and policy advice to enhance and institutionalise cooperation with, and between the actors of both levels.
- The Government of Albania, through joint efforts by other donors and Swiss, committed to further decentralization through the “Cross-cutting strategy on Decentralisation and Local Governance 2015-2020” and related legislative framework concerning the role, functions and organisation of the local self-government, as well as important aspects on public finances.

### Lessons learnt

- Territorial Administrative Reform, was a major transformative policy reform with ramification at different levels political, administrative, sectoral service delivery etc. A key takeaway lesson therefore is, how to ensure that, through different mechanism, policy actors are capacitated and induced to engage in policy discussions in an informed way. A point in case is the multi-layer multi actor approach adopted by the Swiss in support to TAR, which ensured that all perspectives and levels of local governance became part of the discussion. Such an enabling approach, could further support and benefit Albania in its efforts to fully comply with the Copenhagen criteria, meaning further decentralisation of public administration and reinforcement of the capacities of both local administration and local elected representatives.
- The voice of local governments in the process was hampered by the polarisation of political parties and the role of the local government associations remains weak. The Consultation Council proved a venue of dialogue between central and local government.
- Synergies and alliances during key reforming processes with other ongoing initiatives and actors as was the case with the USAID, UN, and Council of Europe, as the Swiss approach has *effectively* shown, can help add to the necessary momentum required to advance important reforming processes.
- Flexibility in project design and implementation, as the Swiss support has shown, was a positive approach (if capitalised), which allowed for adaptation to evolving dynamics/context, as was the example of the Territorial Administrative Reform.
- The decentralisation process, and the territorial administrative reform as an essential part of it, cannot be considered a concluded business. Despite much progress there is still a need to support and sustain these ongoing reforms. As such, the ongoing decentralization reform, could benefit from donor joint efforts, complementarity and continued support in the mid-term.



