ROADMAP

ON MONITORING AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION ACTIVITIES

Skopje, December 2023

1. BACKGROUND

Support to Electoral Reforms in North Macedonia is a project of the Government of Switzerland, implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

The project's overall objective (goal) is to support democratic and credible election processes that facilitate political participation and social integration by enabling voters to freely select their representatives and hold them accountable.

The project activities are designed to support this objective through the achievement of three outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Strengthened institutions conduct fair and efficient election processes
- Outcome 2: Internally democratized political parties present citizen-oriented policies and election programs
- Outcome 3: Empowered citizens hold political parties and elected officials accountable

The Project works with a range of stakeholders – civil society organizations (CSOs), political parties, public authorities, and citizens – to further advance the knowledge and expertise about the electoral processes and international good practices. In advancing project's goals, IFES supports the State Election Commission (SEC), lower levels of election administration – Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) and Electoral Boards (EBs) – political parties, and collaborates with other election-related institutions and CSOs, both at the national and local levels.

In addition to the above, Project beneficiaries are government agencies such as Ministry of Information, Society and Administration, Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, State Statistical Office, Ombudsperson Institution, State Audit Office, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice; political parties, voters and citizens.

2. PURPOSE OF THE ROADMAP

With the empowerment of citizens to hold political parties and elected officials accountable as one of the fundamental pillars of the Project, over the past three years significant efforts have been made towards mobilizing active young citizens and civil society groups to promote civic education, inclusion, monitoring and advocacy in their local communities. These efforts resulted in three generations of Community Mobilisers (CMs) who undertook innovative initiatives (2I), each aimed at monitoring a selected electoral promise made at the national or local level and mobilising the community to seek greater accountability and transparency from their elected officials.

The purpose of this Roadmap is to summarize and present the work of electoral promise monitoring and community mobilization through capacity building and small grant assistance to individual activists and CSOs. This roadmap presents results of a **unique effort**, as on most occasions CSOs do not have the financial, expertise and human resources to engage in systematic monitoring and community mobilization. As an additional difficulty, there is often a lack of capacity to summarize results, to analyze and disseminate them, especially when dealing with such complex issues as political party electoral promises and monitoring of transparency and accountability of elected officials.

Despite the fact that monitoring efforts were undertaken for both central government and local government work, this Roadmap will share the results and lesson learned from the monitoring and mobilization/advocacy efforts undertaken at municipality level. Namely the Roadmap serves as a motivational instrument for civil society organizations to engage in improvements in their communities via systematic data gathering and systematic promotion of the results of these efforts. This Roadmap is a reflection of the work of in total 88 individuals (community mobilizers) and 35 CSOs that engaged in community mobilization, monitoring and advocacy in 28 municipalities in the years 2020-2023. The Roadmap summarizes their successes and also challenges with an aim to inspire and show an example of what is possible to others. The purpose of this Roadmap is to serve as an encouragement and engagement instrument for other CSOs.

The distribution of the municipalities and the number of mentored issue is following:

Municipality	No.	Municipality	No.	Municipality	No.
Tetovo	2	Debar	1	Veles	1
Prilep	3	Negotino	1	Vrapchishte	2
Bitola	1	Demir Hisar	1	Kavadarci	1
Skopje / Centar	1	Delchevo	2	Kochani	1
Ohrid	1	Aerodrom	1	Struga	1
Kisela Voda	2	Gostivar	2	Butel	1
Sh. Orizari	2	Centar zupa	1	Bogovinje	1
Strumica	2	Mogila	1	Jegunovce	1
Mavrovo Rostushe	1	Novo Selo	1		
Kumanovo	1	Bosilovo	1		

Table 1: Distribution of the monitoring issues and municipalities

3. WHY MONITOR?

Monitoring, at its essence, is a tool for **constructive citizen engagement**. It allows active citizens to move beyond complaining, commenting and being observers of the shortcomings and problems in their direct and indirect surroundings - their neighborhoods, municipalities, regions and states. Instead, **monitoring is a constructive, interactive and positive citizen engagement tool.**

Engaging&
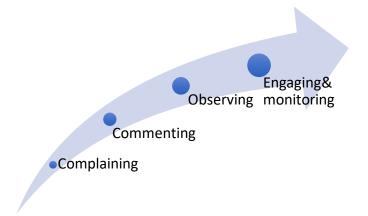Observing monitoring
Commenting
Complaining

Illustration 1: Evolution of citizen participation

The purpose of the civil society monitoring projects is to generate **sufficiently strong data** with the help of which civil society can communicate – systematically and in a competent manner - the issues that need to undergo positive changes for the attention of the decision-makers and others.

From their experiences, individual activists and CSOs who engaged in community mobilization and monitoring activities through their 2I, shared the following observations and important reasons for monitoring:

- **The process of monitoring itself creates positive change:** The monitoring process should not be regarded only as an opportunity for criticism, but also as a positive engagement instrument that shows citizens' interest in higher quality standards and better practices.

- **Monitoring helps fulfill election promises:** Monitoring of election promises not only holds elected officials accountable but also accelerates the implementation of these promises, benefitting the community.

- **Monitoring improves the quality of electoral programs:** Electoral programs of municipal candidates form the basis for policy making once they are elected. By voicing concrete needs in a competent and structured manner, citizens co-create pre-election and municipal programs. The engagement process contributes to mapping the specific needs of the citizens and thus increases the chances to prepare programs that are realistic and respond to the needs of local community.
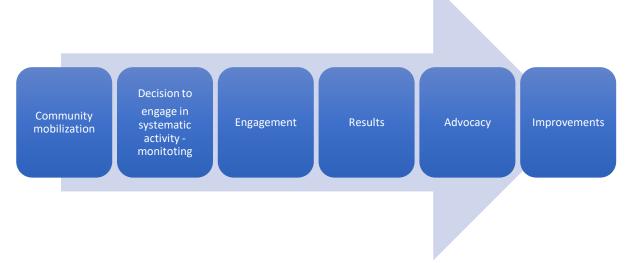

Illustration 2: The logic of community mobilization and monitoring projects

Drawing from **the transformative benefits** that the systematic monitoring of electoral promises at the local level can have on the communities' overall quality of life, an observation of 2I implementers was that this approach should be **upscaled** to the national level, i.e. that the Project should continue the involvement of CSOs in monitoring process at the national and local level and further develop of the monitoring methodology. Not only the electoral promises for municipalities, but also those of government and the work of the public enterprises and governmental agencies should be monitored, as well as the public spending in general.

4. TAKING DECISION WHAT TO MONITOR

Monitoring of political party promises

Monitoring of the election promises of political parties and the mobilization of the community to oversee their fulfillment is a way how civil society **demands accountability** from political parties and their elected representatives.

The process of development of electoral promises follows the following logic:

- Political parties prepare comprehensive election programs that are presented in the pre-election period to the public, **competing** for voters' support.
- The winning parties on the national and local level **translate the electoral promises from their programs into operational activities** within the national and municipal strategies, annual programs and action plans.

Generally, citizens organize in formal and informal initiatives to advocate for the fulfillment of the electoral promises of political parties. This process is especially relevant at the local level where the mayor and elected local authorities **need to keep close relations with the electorate and to deliver results to the community.**

If monitoring of the promises of political parties on the is conducted as a structured exercise, this provides comprehensive and trustworthy information about the status of the given promises and their prioritization, as well as their relevance to citizens' demands and needs.

By participating in the monitoring process municipalities send a message to the public that **they are open and transparent and willing to work jointly** with the CSOs and citizens. Transparency and accountability of elected officials are important tenants of good governance. If a public institution willingly shares information about its work, opens its meetings to civil society representatives and actively seeks civil engagement in its decision-making, its work usually reflects the needs of citizens and a wish to improve. If, however, information is hidden, shared unwillingly and partially, or in a manipulative manner, this gives reasons to suspect mismanagement and corruption.

Monitoring of transparency and accountability of elected officials is a complicated task. If not performed in a professional and impartial manner, it can cause considerable controversy. To ensure the efficiency of this complicated task, the SMS team took the following steps:

- Selected CSOs and CMs for specifically monitoring the prioritized electoral promises as included in the annual programs of the municipalities;
- To support teams, permanent written and oral communication channels were established, e-mail contacts and zoom consultations were available to monitors;
- SMS team provided templates for requests for access to public information;
- Various forms of advice for approaching local government and conduct of interviews with officials were made available.

Along with data collection, monitoring also worked to **remind officials that the activities outlined in their annual programs need to be implemented**.

Examples of the efforts of the CSOs and CMs show **that significant efforts were needed** in order to apply the monitoring approach and achieve results.

| CSO monitors election promise to replace the existing street lighting with more economical LED lighting | CSO organizes: - 9 meetings w/h local govt reps, - 2 site visits | CSO analyzes: - documentation on website, social media, the public procurement system, + maintains regular communication w/h local government officials (phone, email) | Public event to present the findings + advocacy campaign: 3 info flyers, 500 printed. Social media posts: - 3,5 th post impressions, 3,5 th post reach, 300 post engagements. | Installation of 99 led lights on 4 streets, more than previously planned |

Illustration 3: Example 1 of a successful monitoring and mobilization effort.

| CSO monitors the promise: construction of a fire service facility | - 2 meetings with Mayor&Secretary of the Municipality, - analyzes website of municipality - visits the construction site, - organizea a focus group w/h 10 citizens | - Prints&distributes 50 posters, 500 flyers, 3 articles in local portal. - Enters info in the MM&shares on the FB profile of the organization. - Organizes a public event for the presentation of the monitoring findings | The facility is expected to be functional until the end of 2023. |

Illustration 4: Example 2 of a successful monitoring and mobilization effort.

5. HOW TO MONITOR?

Monitoring is systemic data gathering in accordance to an approved/agreed methodology with **an aim to achieve positive change in the community.** Systematic data gathering has to happen in accordance to a **pre-agreed approach**, otherwise the data will lose their **power and credibility**. Credibility and rigorousness of the methodology, as well as its coherent implementation is **the key** for achieving results that can be trusted and **credibly presented**.

Monitoring methodology is a credible, reliable, systematic and pre-agreed way to gather data in a chosen, concrete field on a chosen, concrete topic. In the project "Support to the Electoral Reforms in Macedonia" the monitoring process focused on electoral promises of political parties. To that effect, the monitoring methodology scrutinized the programs of the elected officials on the national and then on the local level to monitor the level of implementation of the electoral programs. The monitoring process was grounded in the use of the Monitoring Matrix[1] (MM) which served as a comprehensive monitoring tool for systematic data collection and presentation.

🞣 Development and use of the Monitoring Matrix

Following the municipal elections of 2021, the project activities focused on monitoring the performance of selected local governments. the Monitoring Matrix focused more closely on measuring results related to the principles of transparency, accountability and citizen participation in decision-making. MM was divided in three categories each including a number of criteria that were monitored in relation to the particular electoral promise. Illustration 2 presents the overview of the MM.
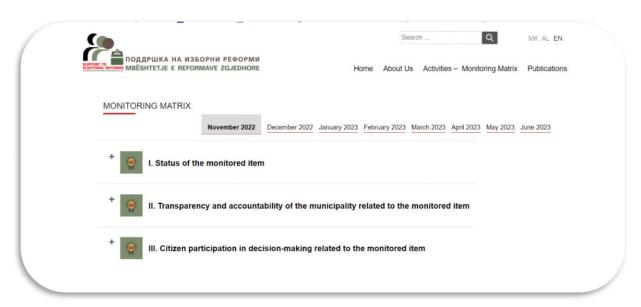

Illustration 5: Categories of the municipal level Monitoring Matrix

The first category of the monitoring tool *Status of the topic* includes two sets of criteria: *Implementation* and/or potential *Stagnation* (Illustration 3).

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[1] More details on monitoring matrix can be found on the following link https://electoralreforms.mk/en/indicator_sector/2021/
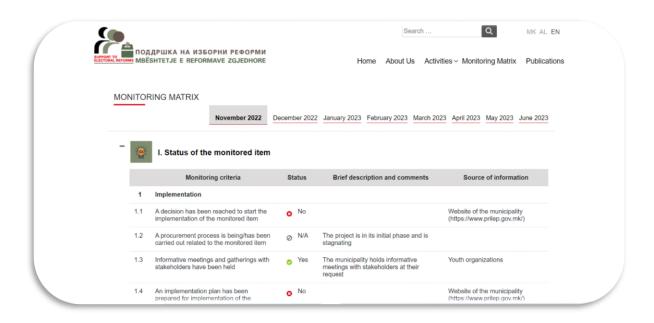
Illustration 6: Components of the category *Status of the monitored electoral promise*

The second category of the MM - *Transparency and accountability of the municipality/institution* includes criteria to measure the openness of the responsible institution towards the public in the area of the electoral promise that is being monitored (Illustration 6).
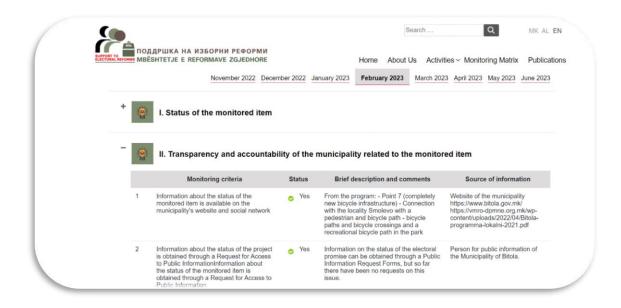

Illustration 7: Components of the category *Transparency and Accountability of the Municipality*

The third category "Citizen participation in decision making" includes criteria that measure to what extent the responsible institution includes the citizens in the decision-making processes related to the electoral promise being monitored (Illustration 7).
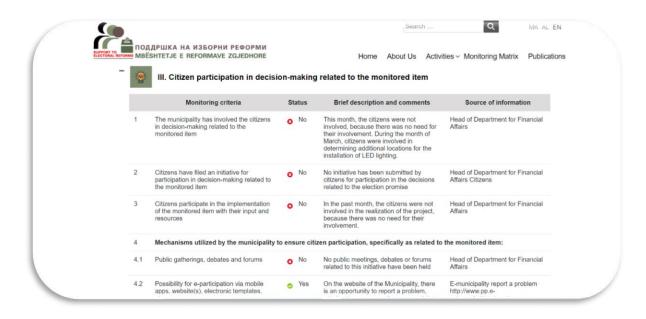
Illustration 8: Components of the category Citizen Participation in Decision Making

The MM for the local level monitoring uses a yes/no scale to record if the specific criterion is satisfied. There is a specific column if some of the criteria are not applicable or data are not available for that particular electoral promise.

In addition, the MM offered a summary of the results for some specific monitoring criteria. The analysis provided useful information about the dynamic of the implementation of the monitored electoral promises and the methods used by the public institutions and municipalities to be transparent and to include citizen in their decision-making related to the monitored electoral promise. Below is the example of some of the summary findings from the monitoring experience within the project "Support to the Electoral Reforms" as follows:

- In 2022 the realization of specific activities had started in 70% of the monitored promises and in 70 %, initial results of the implementation can be seen. These data show **a slight increase** of 10% in the indicator *Initial results from the implementation of the monitored item are visible* compared to the data from the start of the monitoring process. However, there remain some 20% of the pre-election promises, which are in the focus of monitoring, for which the municipalities have not yet started implementation.

- Regarding the transparency and accountability of the municipalities for the monitored promise, a high 60% of the municipalities **have not shared information** about the status of the monitored promise on the municipality website. Considering this data, a cumulative decrease of 20% in this indicator was noticed compared to data from the start of the monitoring process.

- Regarding the mechanisms used by the municipality to ensure the involvement of citizens, the open doors days are the most frequently used mechanism of the municipalities (60%), while specially organized public gatherings, debates or forums are still the less used mechanism in only 20% of the monitored promises; 60% of the municipalities use some form of e-participation such as mobile apps, website forms and other electronic templates.

The entire data collection and monitoring system was based on a web solution where CM entered the results based on the data collected on monthly bases. Monitors highly appreciated the opportunity of the on-line data entry and suggested that MM website is promoted and its update continued, including all novelties, features and improvements of its accessibility and user-friendliness

The current version of the MM provides data that enable citizens, CSOs and other local stakeholders to follow the work of the municipalities related to the election promises subject of monitoring.

MM is very effective for informing the public in an accessible, understadable and structured manner about the work of the municipality.

Assessment of the Monitoring Matrix by monitors

MM enables summary and analysis of the progress in the implementation of municipalities' annual programs and their transparency to the public.

Skills and knowledge of using MM should be presented to peers showing the benefits of this type of data collection and monitoring process.

Illustration 9: The importance for Monitoring Matrix as seen by monitors

Data gathering process

The MM as a tool for data collection and presentation advanced over the project from a simple Excel spreadsheet to a sophisticated web-based solution. Data entry was done by the CM while Strategic Management Systems (SMS), who created the MM, provided quality assurance. An important quality of the MM was its multilingual nature allowing CMs to monitor and enter data in three languages including Macedonian, Albanian and English. This approach further enabled tailored presentation of the collected data about to the stakeholders and citizens in the communities

Sources of information for data input

> *Most frequent forms for information collection:*
> - *Publicly available data on the internet (web social media)*
> - *Request for information to institutions*
> - *Interviews with institutional representatives*

The fact-based data collection was conducted through document analysis, sending requests for publicly accessible information to the institutions, analysis of the websites and social media, surveys, interviews etc.

In addition, the CM teams **contacted municipalities** on a monthly basis to require information about the status of the selected priority. The CMs also established direct communication with relevant

representatives of the municipal administration and **conducted face-to-face interviews** and meetings to understand the status of the selected priority and get more information about the transparency of the municipality and the participation of the citizens in the decision-making related to the specific priorities.

The CMs regularly collected answers to their questions by analysing the documentation such as municipal annual reports, program reports and strategic documents and by sending requests of publically accessible information. **Municipalities in most cases provided regular answers to these requests and the content was satisfactory.** On occasion, the answers were not complete, so the CMs continued with direct contact and communication until they received the requested information. This comprised regular practice of communication with municipal authorities and as such was a good exercise for the CM on how to establish and maintain cooperation and **communication** with the authorities in a **constructive and systemic manner**.

Some of the municipalities have also shown a good example of transparently sharing information on their Facebook profiles and websites. Thus, some of the CM teams had a relatively easy job of regularly following the social media of the municipality and collecting information using this approach. To support the reliability of the data presented within the MM, CMs posted links to the public announcements, media articles and social media posts related to the selected priority being monitored.

6. EFFECTIVE USE OF THE MONITORING RESULTS

The conduct of monitoring produces independent analysis – a competent, data-based assessment of a problem or a particular issue. This allows CSOs to build knowledge and expertise on the subject and **creates a solid ground for effective advocacy for improvements**. Monitoring projects allow CSO **activists to develop into experts** in a particular area and to have **a competent and equal** conversation with municipal and national officials and other stakeholders via various means of communication. In this way, engagement in monitoring projects is an **important organizational and personal empowerment tool.**

Project outputs or tools produced during monitoring are prime advocacy instruments (explained below). Advocacy is the use of these instruments to publically tell about the conclusions of the monitoring process – **highlighting problems and presenting solutions.** This way, via advocacy**, monitoring generates change and improvements.**

Gained Expertise/knowledge/respect

Advocacy: Fact based interaction with decision makers
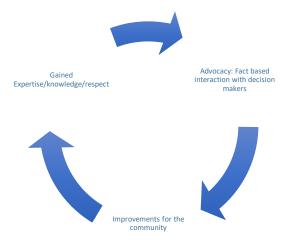
Improvements for the community

Illustration 10: Monitoring helps CSO activists to become experts and advocates for improvements.

So, monitoring is as a method for **developing systematic knowledge for advocacy and promoting positive change**. Monitoring is not a goal of citizen mobilization projects *per se*, rather it is a structured and quality instrument **to achieve improvements for communities and states**.

🔸 Approaches and methods of advocacy

The overall success of the community mobilization projects that use monitoring as their core activity depends on what CSOs and activists *do* with the monitoring results. For this reason, it is useful to **develop an advocacy plan or strategy** that considers the following aspects:

- 🔸 how actively and to whom the monitoring results should be *presented* (work with stakeholders, see below);
- 🔸 how to *defend* the results, i.e. how to increase transparency and openness about the monitoring methodology and approach so that to weaken opposition, criticism and, in worst case, attacks;
- 🔸 how *to promote* results by reaching out to the multipliers, by running active social media campaigns and finding and engaging allies in the promotion of the results;
- 🔸 how well, clearly and actively the project *recommendations* will be presented to the core stakeholders. Precisely and concretely formulated recommendations should always be included in the project report and should be easily accessible. Project recommendations are always a useful tool for active and constructive engagement during advocacy efforts.
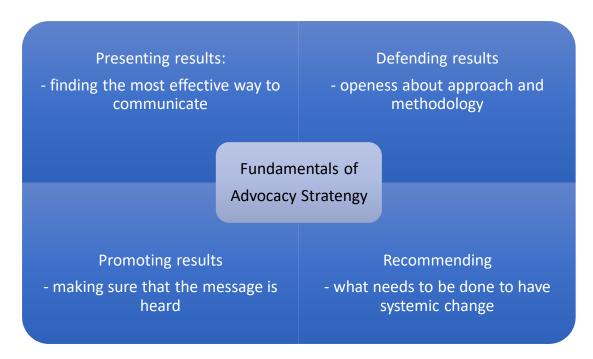
Illustration 11: Four fundamentals of successful advocacy.

Work with stakeholders

Stakeholders are all parties that have *a stake* in the project. Community mobilization projects and their monitoring work is effective if it **is seen and heard** by others; so, all those – journalists, bloggers, influencers, social media activists – who can promote the message of the project are important project stakeholders who need to be systematically addressed and involved.
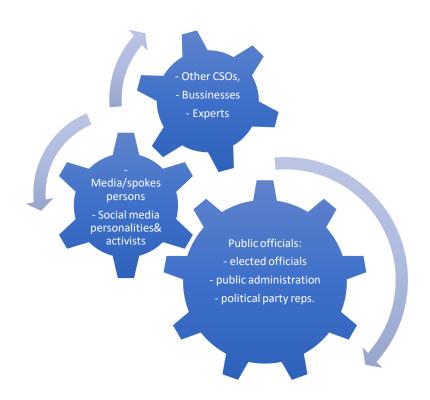

Illustration 12: Mapping project stakeholders.

For municipal officers (administration), the implementation of policies that CSOs advocate for is part of their work duties. For political parties that design their electoral programs and include concrete proposals, CSOs' monitoring and mobilization activities can be at once helpful - in serving as pointers to communities' most pressing needs and helping shape relevant citizen-oriented policies and proposals - but also confrontational – by zooming in on any lagging or failures to perform.

Therefore, is important that CSOs engage in the work with political party and local self-government representatives in **a constructive and pragmatic manner**. The best way to address confrontation is to be fully **open and transparent** about the goals of the project (positive change), methodology that the project uses (clear explanation of MM) and the data gathered and well as to be honest, impartial and trustworthy in data interpretation.

Case 1: Digital tools as a method for facilitating access of the citizens to municipal services

As an innovative initiative, a CSO from the Southwestern Region monitored the electoral promises for (1) increased citizen participation in the delivery of municipal services and (2) increased transparency, responsibility and accountability of the municipality and municipal enterprises by using digital technology. One of the key activities within this initiative was to design and develop a smartphone application that would enable municipal residents to report communal issues or seek communal services in problem areas that most frequently affect them. After several public consultations for the collection of citizens' feedback on the development and fine-tuning of the respective app, three key areas for development were identified - water/sewage, lighting and infrastructure. CSO then began consultations with the local self-government aimed at official municipal involvement, support and integration of the app as an approved digital tool. Two months after the creation of the app, it was accepted by the municipality, it was decided that it would be jointly administered by three CSO administrators and one municipal representative. At the time of the outcome review, 7 real problems related to plumbing and sewage had been reported by the citizens to the municipality, 3 problems with the public lighting, 3 infrastructure problems, 5 problems related to cleanliness and the environment, and 2 meetings with the Mayor had been scheduled.
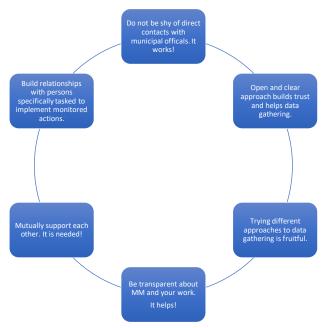
Illustration 13: Building constructive relations with public officials

Citizens and other CSOs

Another important group of stakeholders are citizens and other civil society groups. These are people who have an ability to put pressure on the decision makers to implement concrete policies. However, often these groups have lost trust in their ability to individually and collectively voice their grievances and achieve results. Therefore, part of the strategy to engage with other civil society groups is also to offer them ways of participation that help overcome their scepticism and show the concrete benefits that their actions can bring. For instance, if CMs can demonstrate that they have already built constructive relationships with the municipal administration, they might have it easier to convince others to follow. Often, monitoring projects are directly connected to the situation of, for instance, vulnerable groups in the communities. In such instances, civil society groups that represent their interests (e.g. parents of special needs children) will be active and reliable promoters of the project results and advocates for improvements.

Case 2: Assembling civil sector efforts to advocate for and gain municipal support

As an innovative initiative, a CSO from the Eastern Region monitored the implementation of the election promise related to the adoption of *the 2022-2025 Municipal Strategy* for cooperation with CSOs and the provision of a budget for its implementation. The municipality is small, with some 15,000 inhabitants, and although the civic sector is well represented, with some 46 active CSOs, they at times have opposing interests. To alleviate this, the CSO engaged with peers from the sector via 3 trainings for 14 NGOs and 60 participants on access to public information; budget monitoring, access to open finances; training on advocacy and lobbying. In addition, 10 video narratives were prepared as part of the online campaign aiming at giving visibility of the CSOs' work and impact. The new-found unity and dispelling of the past rivalries across the civic sector was cited as one of the greatest achievements in the advocacy process as it increased united pressure on the municipality instead of fighting each other. Faced with the persistence of a united civic sector, the Local Self-Government allocated a budget of 1,220,000 MKD for *the Strategy* in the Program for Financial Support of Citizens' Associations and Sports Associations. Implementation activities continue.

Outputs generated by monitoring

In the current day saturated information space, a careful consideration of what communication tools the project will use is important. Generally, monitoring projects use reports, press statements, leaflets, videos, social media visuals and other communication means as communication instruments. Almost all projects used some or all of these communication methods.

Leaflets and posters are useful materials to inform elderly persons and those living in rural areas. For example, in order to inform the citizens about the established municipal service for care of the elderly persons in rural areas, the grantee printed leaflets with information about the scope of this service and the certified professionals who are providers of the service. In addition, in order to gather citizens' feedback and satisfaction with the service, the project grantee organized a debate that was promoted on social media. Posters with info about the debate were printed and distributed in the villages belonging to that specific rural municipality to bring the information closer to those elderly persons who do not use social media.

Visuals, such as info graphs and memes, are useful tools to present data from the surveys and analytical reports conducted as part of the monitoring and advocacy processes. For example, the grantee conducted a survey about the infrastructure and building the road in a nearby village. The survey results were presented both in meetings with the elderly population and also shared on social media in the form of visuals (graphs and figures) to inform the young population that is not attending the meetings in the village.

Such visuals usually provide short information about the results from the surveys and keep the attention of the reader, especially the younger population, by using eye-catching imagery. In addition, attractive and funny cartoon characters (or memes) can also attract attention and inform. Short videos (up to 60 seconds) can also be useful, especially when social media algorithms for targeting particular audience in a particular community are used. Clear video presentation using a limited number of data visualization, narrated clearly and using subtitles, can also be easily viewed on smart phones and, if created in a catching way, create interest and engagement. In general, planning of what project outputs are to be generated and how they would be used should be part of the advocacy strategy; this of course does not exclude a possibility to use some *ad hoc* solutions when such need emerges.

7. KEY TAKE-AWAYS: LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Continuity and patience are important:** Monitoring of the work of local and national authorities requires patience and continuity. Constant monitoring can create stronger public pressure and better results.
- **Monitoring creates a new generation of politicians:** The conduct of local monitoring projects informs the politicians that their work is being watched. Constant monitoring efforts contribute to creating a new generation of politicians that think more carefully about the development of electoral programs, especially, their applicability for the real needs of citizens.
- The monitoring process and the SMS program for capacity development **helped in developing skills of young people and representatives of CSOs** included in the program for data collection, communication with the municipal representatives and regular follow-up activities. Facilitation and mentoring throughout the program is important.

- The **mentoring sessions and meetings organized with CMs and CSOs enabled the exchange of experience on peer-to-peer level** and plenty of useful advice and recommendations.
- The upgrade of the **data entrance process** enabled direct data entrance by the CM in the MM. This approach was **time efficient** whereas the oversight role of the SMS team still guaranteed data quality and reliability.
- The translation of the MM in three languages was also conducted online, which also accelerated the process of data publishing.
- The new format of the MM tailored to encompass the requirements of monitoring the local-level electoral promises **is a more user-friendly tool that provides simple information easy to understand and easy to use**. As such, the MM has a great potential as an **informative and advocacy tool for CSOs and municipalities**.
- The dissemination activities helped in **spreading the information about the electoral promises** undertaken by the local governments and offered quality information about the **status of the electoral promises**, the **transparency of the municipality** related to the particular electoral promise as well as the **participation of the citizens in the decision-making** processes.
- The advocacy and dissemination **activities mobilized a wider community** interested in the implementation of a particular electoral promise. **Local media were engaged** in developing stories and articles. They also invited CSO representatives to talk about the electoral promises and that way informed citizens about the status of the issue. **Professionals and other citizens from the local communities participated in the public events** and provided their views regarding the specific electoral promise.
- **Consistency and transparency** about the goals of the project, the used approach and the teams working with it are fundamental for the project **success**.