



**MINISTRY OF
LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT**

www.mls.gov.mn



**UN
DP**

www.undp.org.mn



Making
local government
work for the people

Making local government work for the people

FOREWORD

by the Minister for Local Self-Government, Mr. Nevzat Bejta, and UNDP Resident Representative, Ms. Deirdre Boyd

Over the past decade the Ministry of Local Self-Government and UNDP have implemented numerous joint projects aimed at developing the system of local self-government in line with European standards and practices. The focus of our attention has been the process of government decentralization as a means of ensuring more democratic, participatory governance and the delivery of services more closely tailored to people's needs.

Municipalities have demonstrated impressive flexibility and vitality in overcoming the various challenges which have arisen in the course of implementing these reforms. This is especially true of small rural municipalities that have needed to adapt to change with limited resources and capacities for service delivery.

For while decentralization has assigned similar competences to each municipality in a single tier of local self-government, fundamental disparities remain between municipalities in terms of size, geography and population and in terms of financial and other capacities. A key challenge has thus been to ensure that all municipalities, despite their widely differing capacities, are able to provide their citizens with the same range and standard of public services.

One of the most successful and innovative ways in which municipalities have sought to address such capacity gaps and improve their service delivery has been through inter-municipal cooperation.

To strengthen and encourage such cooperation, the Government and UNDP initiated a nation-wide programme on inter-municipal cooperation in 2006 with the generous support of the Government of Norway.

Today the country is one of the few in Europe with a law on Inter-Municipal Cooperation. And it has brought this law to life through the initia-

tion of 26 successful inter-municipal partnerships involving 62 municipalities in important areas such as social and environmental protection, urban planning and revenue collection.

More than 800,000 people and 200,000 households throughout the country have benefited from expanded and improved public services. Many of the most socially vulnerable groups who previously suffered from limited access to basic services have since experienced the positive effects of inter-municipal cooperation.

A comprehensive training programme on inter-municipal cooperation has been delivered to more than 800 municipal officials. With greater knowledge and strengthened capacities, these officials are now equipped to ensure more efficiency, accountability and social inclusiveness in the delivery of their services.

The purpose of this short publication is to capture some of these success-stories.

As the country is now emerging as a leader in the region and a centre for excellence on inter-municipal cooperation, valuable experience and lessons learnt are already being shared with other countries such as Montenegro, Moldova and the Ukraine. This will certainly be another great asset for the country's process of EU integration.

None of this could have been achieved without the excellent cooperation between the Ministry of Local Self-Government, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Environment, the Association of Units of Local Self-Government, the mayors, the municipalities, the media, the Government of Norway and UNDP.

We are firmly committed to providing continued support for local governments in working for people and ensuring a better and more sustainable future for all.

Success stories



ZAJAS – OSLOMEJ

‘Now there is a lot more hope’

When the resources of local government are stretched to the limit and municipalities lack the capacity to provide basic services, it is often the most vulnerable people in society who pay the greatest cost.

This was the situation until recently in the municipalities of Zajas and Oslomej. ‘We just didn’t have the means or the mechanisms in place to solve all the issues related to social welfare and child protection,’ explains Burim Sejдини, Secretary of the Municipality of Zajas. ‘The needs of the most vulnerable groups—the very young, elderly people without families, and people with disabilities—are all very different and our municipalities didn’t have the capacity to provide them with the services they needed. We had to find a solution.’

Zajas and Oslomej found the solution in inter-municipal co-operation, establishing a permanent joint committee to share

their competence for social and child protection and developing closer links with local schools, local media, and with the relevant institutions of the central government.

‘By working together we have been able to cut the costs of implementing basic services,’ says Begzat Aliu, a civil servant from the Oslomej municipal administration. ‘This is very important because it allows us to devote resources to improving our responsiveness to the people who are most in need and to invest in making our services more efficient.’

Education has been a major focus of the joint committee’s activities. Asan Limani, a local primary-school teacher who took part in training provided by the inter-municipal project, describes the impact:

‘I’ve been teaching here for the past thirty-five years and all too often I’ve met children with special needs who are excluded in the educational process. The training we received as part of the inter-municipal project—and the training planned for the future in meeting these children’s educational needs—will make a big difference. It is helping us develop

the skills to make sure these children are not excluded.'

Registering and mapping social vulnerable groups is another vital area in which the municipalities of Zajas and Oslemej have made progress by working together. 'There are a lot of elderly people in our municipality who don't have any family to look after them,' says Lutfi Osmani, president of the village council of Zajas Chelikaj and a long-time activist for improving social conditions. 'Before this project it seemed no-one from the local authorities cared about these people. Now with the registration and the municipalities visibly working together to map the needs of the people who really need their help, there is a lot more hope.'

KRIVOGASTANI - DOLNENI

'Now that's a proper market!'



With decentralization increasing the number of services performed by local government, smaller rural municipalities soon discover the necessity of boosting their fiscal capacity and developing their human resources. By committing themselves to inter-municipal co-operation, Krivogastani and Dolneni have been able to develop far more efficient methods of collecting local taxes.

The big picture

Decentralization - an ambitious reform project

The country's ambitious programme of decentralization began a decade ago after the signing of the 2001 Ohrid peace agreement. These wide-ranging reforms aim to ease ethnic tensions and promote political stability through greater democratization while improving the quality, efficiency and inclusiveness of public services by bringing government closer to local people.

Local governments have been under great pressure to adapt to these reforms and to meet the challenges of helping build a more stable, more democratic and multi-ethnic state while expanding and improving the quality of the public services they deliver. For municipalities to meet these challenges they have needed to find ways to build their institutional capacity.

‘Through the training for this project and the support of UNDP we have increased the collection of local taxes and duties from 40 to 70 per cent,’ reports Zaklina Zitosanska, a civil servant from the Krivogastani – Dolneni municipal administration. ‘This is mainly because our technical capacity has improved and so the database of taxpayers in both municipalities has expanded. Our media campaign to raise people’s awareness of tax rights and obligations has also proved very effective.’

Increased revenues gave the two municipalities the opportunity to show local people the direct results of paying their taxes. A good example can be seen in the village of Krivogastani where work is underway for the construction of a refurbished and much bigger market-place.

‘Now this looks like a proper market!’ says Cvetan Kushkovski, 55, as he looks at the very concrete results of inter-municipal cooperation.

RADOVIS – KONCE

Raising environmental standards, reducing bureaucracy

Radovis and Konce have been actively co-operating in tax collection and urban planning for some years now. And with UNDP’s support the two municipalities have recently undertaken a joint project to share the challenge of introducing new standards for environmental protection.

As part of the project *Strengthening Communities by Establishing Standards*,



the municipalities have conducted a joint survey, held a public meeting to inform citizens about the new regulations, and produced guidelines to help local businesses complete the procedures for obtaining permits in line with new environmental standards.

Sharing resources in this way has helped the two municipalities streamline their services for local companies.

‘I am very satisfied with the services from the municipalities,’ says Krste Georgiev, the owner of a local company for fruit and vegetable conservation. ‘We needed to get an integrated B permit in order to apply for food safety certificates and the municipalities helped us greatly with this procedure. I fully expect our application to be successful.’

BEROVO-PEHCEVO-DELCEVO-VINICA

Developing skills for a better future

‘Working with colleagues from the municipal administration and the UNDP inter-municipal co-operation team was a great experience for me,’ says Natasha Shumanska, ‘The team gave me great support and answered all my questions about legal procedures for public

procurements, completing applications, writing reports and all the other things you need to know when applying for a project.’

Natasha first gained valuable experience of inter-municipal cooperation while working as a student intern with the municipality of Berovo. At that time the municipality was applying to UNDP for support in establishing a centre for inter-municipal development in the micro-region of Berovo, Pecevo, Delcevo and Vinica.



Natasha has since graduated and is now using the skills she gained to apply to GTZ for her own regional marketing project—the production and promotion of a thematic map of the eastern planning region. In preparing her application, Natasha was able to turn for help to the same inter-municipal development centre that she helped establish.

‘The new centre offers a lot of opportunities for young people,’ says Natasha. ‘It encourages and supports people who want to learn and build their capacities and contribute to the development of this part of the country.’

All 85 municipalities, large and small, have had to learn quickly how to carry out new responsibilities in important areas such as urban planning, environmental protection, local economic development, social protection, education and healthcare.

As part of the decentralization programme, local governments were to be provided with the political, administrative, financial and human resources needed to assume their new responsibilities. The transfer of competences and resources, however, has not always been smooth, especially for smaller, rural municipalities. These municipalities have all faced similar problems in terms of understaffing, insufficient financing and underdeveloped infrastructure. Twenty percent of them were unable to provide even the most basic municipal services.

The biggest municipality in the country is the municipality of Kumanovo, with 100,000 inhabitants, 133 employees in the municipal administration, and an annual budget of 23,000,000 EUR.

KOCANI- PROBISTIP

Reclaiming the high ground

Living in the busy centre of Kocani, Ljubisa Mandic, 45, likes to get out of town as much as possible to stay in his cottage in the foothills of the beautiful mountain of Osogovo. ‘That’s where I find relaxation,’ he says, ‘in the mountain sun, the clean air and the forests. Osogovo is a really attractive area with a lot of potential value. The slopes are gentles and this makes it inhabitable right up to the highest parts of the mountain. But the infrastructure needs a lot of development.’

The municipalities of Kocani and Probitip share Ljubisa’s love of the area, his belief in its potential for attracting environmentally-friendly investment, and his concern for improving local services.

Until recently, however, Ponikva was one of many areas in the country that experienced the negative aspects of falling within the administrative boundaries of two municipalities – the neglect that can easily arise from not being seen as the responsibility of any single public body. As Kocani and Probitip are showing, however, inter-municipal co-operation can turn this negative into a positive asset by pooling resources to bring about greater change than either municipality could implement alone.

‘Lately I’ve already seen quite a bit of activity in my area of Ponikva, with groups coming out to tell us about the plans for development,’ says Ljubisa. ‘I think it’s excellent that both municipalities have come together to find a solution to the

infrastructure issues and that they have the support of UNDP.’

The joint project undertaken by Kocani and Probitip has identified the need to develop the water supply, pave the roads, and legalize unregulated buildings in the area as key priorities for attracting investment.



‘We get a lot of visitors,’ says Vlado Stojanov, the young owner of *Osogovski Biser*, a restaurant in the picturesque setting, ‘And there will be even more when the road has been paved. I welcome this idea and I’ve no doubt it will bring in more visitors and more investments.’

‘Life here will be much better when the water supply is available,’ says Dejan Rashkov, owner of a local summer house, ‘This area is already an important resource for local people – especially for farmers, but also people who make use of the medicinal plants, the wild berries and the mushrooms. With water being brought in and the roads being paved, Osogovo will become even more attractive for visitors and make it possible to revive traditional stockbreeding here.’

KAVADARCI – ROSOMAN

'From us—for us'

Inter-municipal co-operation on the collection of duties and taxes has led to a ten percent increase in the number of tax-payers in Kavadarci and Rosoman. The joint efforts of these municipalities have significantly increased the number of buildings registered for tax purposes, while co-operation on property valuation has almost doubled the amount of the municipal tax base for 2010.

With technical and financial support from UNDP, Kavadarci and Rosoman achieved these results by setting up a joint committee for the valuation of property, a media campaign to raise public awareness of the importance of timely payment of taxes, and improvements in the upkeep of their taxpayer database.

'The UNDP project helped upgrade the database and now it contains all relevant information and provides a complete overview of the real estate property of taxpayers,' says Anita Ginova Karakotova, the municipality of Kavadarci, 'This has led to a major reduction in the time needed to search and obtain information.'

With increased revenue from tax collection, the municipalities are now carrying out a number of communal projects to improve local infrastructure. The results are already visible in repaired roads and traffic improvements.

Looking down the newly repaired street in the neighbourhood of Ljubas in Kavadarci, Petar Gorcev shows his satisfaction with the changes: 'This is an improvement that comes from us—for us.'

The smallest municipality is the municipality of Vranestica, with 1,300 inhabitants, 13 employees in the municipal administration, and an annual budget of 270,000 USD.

Despite their very different capacities, both municipalities have to provide the same functions and services in line with the requirements of the country's EU integration process.

These great disparities between municipalities soon became a major challenge. And with people becoming impatient to see the benefits they had been promised from decentralization, it was urgent to find an alternative way to ensure the delivery of quality services.

The idea of inter-municipal cooperation soon emerged as the only light at the end of the tunnel. All that was needed was for someone to take the initiative and lead the way.

DOLNENI - KRIVOGASTANI

Changes on the ground

The Mayor of Dolneni, Mr Abdula Bajramoski, has no doubts about the benefits of inter-municipal co-operation with neighbouring Krivogastani:

‘Before we carried out this joint project,’ he says, ‘we had to engage people from outside to help complete our tasks, costing us an additional 120,000 denars per year for each municipality. With the establishment of the joint body for environment protection, the same competencies are implemented more efficiently and without additional costs to our municipal budgets.’

Co-operating on issues of environmental protection, the two municipalities have achieved savings both in money and time. For the members of the joint committee, working together has led to a substantial increase in productivity and capacity.

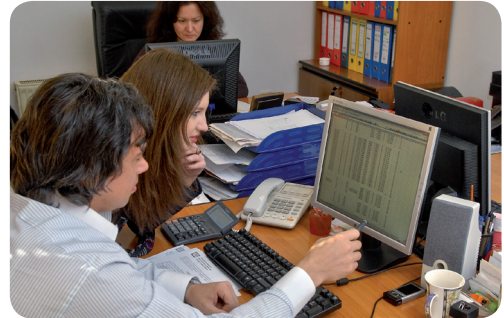
These improvements are being felt by citizens on the ground – quite literally – as the committee’s smooth functioning has recently reviewed and approved the reconstruction of a road from Debreste to Lazani in record time.

‘Through the establishment of inter-municipal cooperation and with the help of UNDP and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning,’ says Goran Nineski, a member of the joint body for environment protection in the municipality of Dolneni, ‘we have managed to build the necessary capacity to jointly carry out this obligation. Previously we lacked the expertise and technical capacity to process integrated B permits and elabo-

rates for environmental impact. Now, we have all the necessary conditions to provide an expert review of the requests and decision-making.’

GEVGELIJA - VALANDOVO

Visualizing success



Promoting investment is a key goal for every municipality and sharing resources has proved a powerful way for municipalities to succeed in this goal. A recent joint project carried out by Gevgelija and Valandovo provides a good example of how such co-operation can boost investment.

With land available for sale in prime locations, the two municipalities found that local businesses needed more information about the sites before they could decide to invest. ‘They needed a clearer picture of the available plots,’ says Mr. Ivan Frangov, mayor of Gevgelija, ‘So we worked together to produce a detailed investment map showing the exact locations and the available infrastructure and displayed it in public places for potential bidders to see. The map highlighted the most attractive locations for investment in the Gevgelija and Valandovo micro-region, including seven plots in the Blokotehna industrial zone.’

One young local entrepreneur who has already benefitted from the investment map is Maja Dimceva. As the director of *Amigo* transport company, Maja was looking for a suitable parking location for her fleet of modern coaches. Finding the right location with good access to roads was made much easier with the help of the new investment map and the assistance of the department for urban planning.

'The visual presentation of all the information about the investment zone was a big factor in my deciding to bid,' says Maja. 'If I hadn't had the opportunity to see it, I most probably wouldn't have participated in the public bidding.'

Maja's bid for two of the available plots recently proved successful. 'I'd like to thank the municipalities for making all the information available,' she says, 'And I really encourage the municipal administration to continue updating its database. This is the only way for us to get a realistic picture of the economic potential of the area.'

NOVACI – MOGILA

Less is more

One of the greatest challenges facing all municipalities is that of improving tax assessment and collection. This has proven to be another key area in which inter-municipal co-operation can produce major improvements for tax-collectors and local people. The recent experiences of Novaci and Mogila show just how much can be gained from working together to meet the challenge.

UNDP supports the first ever pilot project on inter-municipal cooperation in the country

In 2006, UNDP started a pilot project called *Inter-Municipal Partnerships for Improved Service Delivery*. The project was launched in three small rural municipalities in the southeastern part of the country: Bosilovo, Vasilevo, and Novo Selo.

The first ever initiative of this type in the country lasted for two years and was supported by the government of Norway with 400,000 EUR.

The first step for the three municipalities was to form joint administrative bodies in the area of tax management, urban planning and inspection.

Positive results were already being seen one year later when a small but well organized and efficiently trained administration was put in place.

'The training we received as part of the project for a joint department for taxes has helped us overcome many of the administrative problems we were facing,' says Letka Jovanovska, Head of Department within the Novaci municipal administration, 'Thanks to this project and the help of UNDP, our tax department is now much more efficient and our database management has greatly improved.'



Following the initial training sessions, the two municipalities designated funds and assigned six new personnel for the establishment of joint committees for property tax valuation. 'At first I was concerned about how local people would react to the new method of tax collection,' says Svetlana Petkovska, a member of the joint body for property tax assessment, 'But the citizens soon saw how much more efficiently we used the revenue and their participation has made them much more aware of how paying taxes can increase the living standards of everyone in the community.'

The citizens of Novaci and Mogila have not only seen the benefits of inter-municipal co-operation in the form of improved local services through more efficient tax collection, they have also noticed a major reduction in the amount of bureaucracy and time needed to get things done. 'When we needed permits for donating waste containers throughout

the two municipalities,' says Igorce Risteovski from the Novaci ecological society, 'We expected to have to apply to each municipality separately. Normally these procedures take a lot of time and end up costing money. But with the new organization we managed to get the permits issued for both municipalities in just one day.'

Novaci and Mogila have since gone on to expand their mutual cooperation and apply the skills they have gained to other community projects. Their recent initiative to set up a joint committee for improving the environment and ensuring a clean water supply in both municipalities is a case in point. 'Thanks to the training we received from UNDP, we soon had all the necessary paperwork ready and standardized,' says Nikolina Gligurovska, Head of Department within the Mogila municipal administration. 'Things are much more efficient now we have a structure to discuss issues together and reach joint decisions.'

GOSTIVAR – VRAPCISTE

Where the streets had no names

Sharing emergency services across municipalities is no easy task when accurate maps are unavailable and many road-signs are lacking or have fallen into disrepair. For the municipality of Gostivar, providing fire-fighting protection for neighbouring Vrapciste used to be a serious problem.

'Not having an accurate map in areas where there are few signs or street names meant our drivers often had to

stop and ask for directions,' says local fire-fighter Izet Cana. 'The old map was totally inappropriate and we were wasting precious time trying to locate fires. This could lead to critical delays.'

Thankfully, the two municipalities have found a solution through inter-municipal cooperation on producing and checking a new map of the micro-region.

The new map has updated all the numbers and names of the streets and the joint committee for inter-municipal cooperation has been checking its accuracy with local fire crews.



Having worked for the fire brigade in Gostivar for fifteen years, Izet can tell the difference:

'Our recent fire fighting exercise at two locations in the village of Cegrane was a great success. The new map helped us locate the places immediately and we didn't have to stop and ask for directions. I keep the new map in front of me. It's very precise. As soon as I get an emergency call I can locate the fire in thirty seconds. Thanks to this, our brigade can immediately intervene and get the situation under control.'

Today there are four tax officers administrating local taxes and fees for all three municipalities. If this service were to be provided by each municipality separately, fifteen employees would be needed.

By providing joint services, the municipalities managed to make significant budget savings - a total of 200,000 EUR per year. With this amount saved, each municipality can afford to build at least one sports centre, several playgrounds, or a three-kilometre stretch of road.

Thanks to the efficiently trained administration, the municipalities recorded an increase in tax revenues of more than 100 per cent.

More than 10,000 households in all three municipalities are now enjoying access to much better quality services.

ZRNOVCI AND CESINOVO-OBLESEVO

Meeting the neighbours



The residents of Zrnovci and Cesinovo-Oblesevo are already experiencing the benefits of inter-municipal co-operation in tangible ways.

Supported by UNDP, the two municipalities recently set up a shared project for communal inspection and economic development. From their newly equipped office, a dedicated joint inspector and warden for the municipalities were quick to inform residents about their new services and have already started meeting the needs of local people.

Persa Bozinova was one of the first residents to take advantage of the services. Persa retired some years ago from her job in Skopje to live in her old house in the village of Morodvis. On her return, however, she was dismayed to discover that the waste from her neighbour's cows was leaking into her yard. The problem soured relations between the neighbours for years and no easy solution seemed available. So when she found out about the new joint communal inspection services, Persa soon made up her mind to report her problems to the office.

On the very same day that Persa reported her problem, the joint warden went out to Morodvis. 'I took notes of

everything and I also had a long talk with the neighbour,' says Simona Goceva. 'It turned out that he was throwing liquid manure into his garden because he didn't have time to take it elsewhere. Whenever it rained, the manure would go into Mrs. Bozinova's yard. I gave him a deadline of seven days to remove the manure and to find an alternative and safe location for disposal. Four days later, Persa came to our inter-municipal office to thank us for our kindness. "My problem was a big one," she said, "but the solution turned out to be very simple. Thank you all so much." This problem had been bothering her for a long time and now the two neighbours can finally have good relations again. Everything was solved in a single conversation.'

STIP – KARBINCI

'A roof over their heads'

Smaller municipalities created by the decentralization reforms have had to take on the double challenge in recent years of building up new organizations while at the same trying to cope with the same responsibilities as their larger and more established neighbours. Cooperation can lighten this burden on new municipalities and increase their capacity for the future. Just how effective such cooperation can be is clear from the results of a joint project on urban planning in Stip and its new neighbouring municipality of Karbinici.

'One of the biggest tasks facing both Stip and Karbinici was the need to legalize all the unregulated buildings in our region,' says Nikola Iliev, the Local Economic Development Coordinator in the municipality of Stip, 'This was a major challenge

because there were so many thousands of these structures and even the most basic data about them was lacking. It wasn't a process we could carry out alone.'

The two municipalities decided to tackle the issue together, signing an agreement for cooperation and setting up a joint committee on urban planning. UNDP provided support for training and equipment with 20,000 euro as part of the project for *Inter-Municipal Co-Operation for Better Service Delivery and EU Accession*. Within six months the committee had developed a database, gathered and recorded all the information on unregulated buildings from the archives of the tax department, and was ready to start mapping and collecting further data from residents in both municipalities.

'The main aim at this stage was to get as many people as possible to come forward and legalise their unregulated buildings,' explains Nikola Iliev. 'To do this we explained and publicized the project in the media and set up a one-stop shop to make it easier for people to start the regularization process. We knew the citizens would take advantage of the opportunity when they understood the benefits of legally owning these buildings.'

'I heard about the project and I immediately came to report my house,' says Mirko Maksimov, whose house is located in a non-urban zone. 'I needed the problem solved as quickly as possible. I want to make sure my children have a roof over their heads and don't have to worry about the future.'

'The whole project has been very well accepted by the citizens of both municipalities,' says Nikola. 'And people have

"The results of the Inter-Municipal Cooperation Programme are truly spectacular. I am very proud that our municipality has been a pioneer of this initiative. Thanks to this project, all our citizens have access to much better quality services and we have also managed to make significant budget savings."

Ljupco Kolev, Mayor of the municipality of Bosilovo

In 2008, this project was proclaimed as best practice in the category of "improved quality of local services" by the Council of Europe, the Association of Local Self-Governments, the European Agency for Reconstruction, USAID, and the Ministry of Local Self-Government.

welcomed the opportunity to make their buildings legal.'

By the time the project was complete, over five thousand unregulated buildings had been recorded in the municipality of Stip and another 800 in Karbinici. As well as raising revenue to invest in the community and helping people secure their claims to property, inter-municipal co-operation has provided the participants with training and experience, greatly strengthening their capacity to take on future projects.

'We are the first to develop this software and map all the illegal buildings in this way, says Nikola, 'And a lot of other municipalities in the country are now showing an interest in following our example.'

NOVO SELO - BOSILOVO – VASILEVO

Stronger together



The most socially vulnerable groups in society are also the most likely to fall through the cracks in the social welfare system. Often their details are not registered and their status remains unknown to the authorities that have the potential to help. This is why the municipalities of Novo Selo, Bosilovo and Vasileve have decided to combine their efforts in a

project to reach out to the most vulnerable people in their region.

'The first step in tackling social exclusion is to make sure we know who and where the people are that most need help,' says Tuse Stojanov, project coordinator in the municipality of Novo Selo. 'So we have to be pro-active in registering high-priority groups – children with special needs, for example, elderly people without family support, and families with single parents. This means developing the capacity to register and keep track of their status, making the public more aware of the opportunities available for assistance and the importance of registration, and going out to meet these people and learn more about their needs. To do this as effectively as possible, our three municipalities decided to work as a team on a project we call *Stronger Together*.'

Forming a joint committee for inter-municipal co-operation on social protection, the staff from the three municipalities then undertook specialised training for the task. As soon as the team was fully equipped and had all the necessary software for registration, a media campaign was launched to raise public awareness. Working in close co-operation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and co-ordinating its activities with the Institute of Social Affairs and the inter-municipal Centre for Social Care in Strumica, the joint committee set up special teams to gather data in the field.

'We got an excellent response to our registration campaign,' says Tuse Stojanov, 'especially from the teachers and other public bodies we contacted for data on the target groups. We've registered over a thousand people from across the three municipalities and we now have a much

clearer picture of their needs and priorities. Our database now includes details on 699 elderly people without family support, 369 children with disabilities and 52 single-parent families.'

Going out into local communities to meet and register the most vulnerable groups, the project's fieldwork teams found their visits were not only effective in terms of administration but also served to lessen people's sense of social exclusion.

'A lot of the people we met – especially elderly people without any family support – were really pleased just to know we were taking an interest and concerning ourselves with their problems,' says Milica Badzukova from the municipality of Novo Selo. 'In one village – Kolesino – we met two retired teachers, Zivana and Tome Mikovi. They told us "Your visit is really heartening because elderly people like us are quite isolated now our children have left home to find work in the cities. It shows us the municipality cares about us and now we know there is a place we can go to get help and support.'"

The committee's public awareness campaign played an important part in encouraging vulnerable people to register. Aleksandra Cukova, for example, a single parent from Novo Selo village, found out about the scheme through one of the project's public leaflets and contacted the organization. One of the teams soon came out to visit Aleksandra at her home.

'She told us this was the first time that any institution had come to visit and ask about the problems she faced as a single parent. "Whenever we tried before to obtain some support," she told us, "We've always been sent from one institution to another. This activity gives me

A small pilot project turns into a successful nation-wide programme

What started as a small pilot project in 2006, soon turned into a large nation-wide programme.

The Ministry of Local Self Government approached UNDP to jointly draft a Law on Inter-Municipal Cooperation. This Law was to provide the basis for similar forms of partnerships to be replicated in other municipalities throughout the country.

The Government of Norway committed additional USD 2,250,000 to help build the necessary human, institutional and financial capacities for the implementation of Inter Municipal Cooperation on a national scale.

hope that someone will start addressing our problems.” It’s very clear that reaching out to people in this way can send a positive message as well as being absolutely essential if we want to have enough data to make a difference and target those most in need.’

GEVGELIJA – DOJRAN

Getting closer

Making sure people have full access to the social services available in their municipalities can be especially demanding in regions where registration for such services involves long journeys. A recent project undertaken by Dojran and Gevgelija, however, has clearly shown that inter-municipal co-operation really can bring local government closer to the people.

‘The offices of inter-municipal Centre for Social Work in Gevgelija are about thirty kilometers from Dojran.’ says Andrej Angelovski from the municipality of Dojran. ‘Without adequate public transport, this distance can be a heavy burden in terms of time and money for people in Dojran who need to register for social welfare in Gevgelija each month. We decided to make this problem a priority and work together as part of the UNDP-funded project for improving social protection.’

The project focussed on methods for improving communication and co-ordination between the municipalities and the other regional units of central government. ‘We particularly aimed at achieving greater coordination with the Centre for Social Work in Gevgelija,’ reports Andrej, ‘And the result has been much more efficient service provision.’

The joint committee soon developed a highly practical solution to overcome the problem of distance faced by many of their clients. First of all, they successfully pushed through a proposal to assign a representative from the of inter-municipal Centre for Social Work in Gevgelija to make regular visits to Dojran.

‘Then we set up a dedicated office so that residents here no longer need to travel so far,’ says Andrej. ‘We organized the visits to be held on market days because that’s when a lot of people come into Dojran from the surrounding villages. Being there on the ground has not only made it easier for us to deliver social security payments and save people time and money, our presence has brought us closer and encouraged people to come to us for information about social issues affecting them and the services available in the region.’

‘The office in Dojran is a great relief for people like me who don’t have their own transport,’ says Stanka Janceva from the village of Furka. ‘I have to make use of the social services as someone who needs support from a third person. Recently I needed to apply to extend the right of care and in the past this would mean travelling all the way to Gevgelija and a long and complicated process. Now I can go and speak to the representative in Dojran and that saves a lot of trouble. The local office has more time, too, to help me with the documents and advise me about my issues.’

**GOSTIVAR - VRAPCISTE - MAVROVO
AND ROSTUSHA**

No time to elaborate

Until recently, the duties associated with environmental protection – and particularly those related to the issuing of integrated B permits and elaborates – fell heavily on the municipalities of Gostivar, Vrapciste, and Mavrovo and Rostusha. Lack of adequately trained personnel and resources made it difficult, especially for the smaller municipalities, to meet the required standards and fulfil the new competencies assigned to them. The municipality of Mavrovo and Rostusha, for example, had to use the services of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning to ensure all the special activities were fully implemented.

Inter-municipal co-operation has transformed this situation by greatly increasing the capacity of the three municipalities to deliver their environmental protection services more efficiently. As well as the obvious gains arising from better technical resources to carry out their obligations, the experience of training for the project and exchanging information and skills has further built up the human resource capacities of the three municipalities. 'All the staff involved in the project have benefitted from the training and the input from more experienced colleagues,' says Dashmir Osmani, project-coordinator from the municipality of Gostivar.

The project involved setting up a joint inter-municipal committee and carrying out specialized training and familiarization with new dedicated software for maintaining a solid database. The committee quickly went about producing

A UNDP expert team facilitated the drafting of the Law on Inter Municipal Cooperation, which was officially enacted in 2009. The first ever Government's Committee on Inter Municipal Cooperation was established the same year. Shortly after, three additional by-laws and several case-studies were also developed, to help the Government's Committee to build efficient inter-municipal cooperation policies.

Today, the country is one of the very few in Europe that has a Law on Inter Municipal Cooperation.

public information leaflets on the process for obtaining integrated B permits, at the same time upgrading the municipal facilities and streamlining procedures to make it easier and faster for local companies to obtain their permits.

‘We produced a bi-lingual manual and flier with information to facilitate the procedure for the submission of documents for elaborates and integrated B permits,’ says Abdilbari Ebibi at the municipality of Vrapciste, ‘And we organized public information sessions for local companies to obtain information directly, to consult us and to offer their opinions on the procedure.’

In addition, the committee sent out staff to inspect and review the requests of local business premises throughout the three municipalities. ‘These on-the-spot inspections have strengthened the trust held in us by local operators,’ says project-coordinator Dashmir Osmani, ‘And altogether this means we are now able to offer much better provision of services in the region.’

The project has not only resulted in greater coordination between the municipalities and closer contacts with the business sector; better communication and information about local companies has also provided an opportunity for the municipalities to get across their message about the benefits of a cleaner environment. ‘In parallel with the project to speed up the permit procedures, we also carried out an awareness-raising campaign informing all our citizens of the aims and the positive effects of better environmental protection.’

Ferit Shabani, the owner of GOFIKS in Gradec, was the first to obtain an integrated B permit for his business in the

municipality of Vrapciste. ‘The steps the administration took to inform us about the process and make it easier to obtain the permit were crucial for my company. Having a service dedicated to this task saved me a lot of work and valuable time. And knowing we have met all the legal requirements means we can market our company more effectively and feel confident we are not damaging the environment.’

Emil Durmishi is the owner of EMKO, based in the village of Velebrdo in the municipality of Mavrovo and Rostushe. ‘After the visit from the inter-municipal committee I felt confident to prepare an elaborate and submit it for approval. Knowing that the procedure would be handled by our own municipal services with the help of staff in Gostivar and Vrapciste was a big incentive for me. If my request had needed to be sent to the Ministry in Skopje, the way these things used to be handled, I would certainly have had to wait a much longer time for approval.’

KRIVA PALANKA – RANKOVCE

Safer for children

‘Working on environmental protection with Kriva Palanka and with support from the UNDP has brought us much closer to local business people,’ reports the head of Rankovce’s inspection department, Slavica Georgievska, ‘And the reductions we’ve achieved in personnel and costs have freed up resources for other investments in the environment.’

With a new inter-municipal office and an inspector paying regular visits on the ground, local business people and resi-

dents are already enjoying the advantages of co-operation.

Goran Stojkovski, the owner of a recreation complex in the village of Ginovci, recently had his business regulated to comply with environmental protection criteria. 'The brochure and the guidelines I received from the office were really helpful,' he says, 'Without this information it would have been tough to meet all the legal deadlines. The fact that I can get advice directly from officers in my own municipality has saved me a lot of time and the result is that my recreation complex is much safer for children and for the environment.'

'Now we are in daily contact with the citizens and local businesses,' says Slavica Georgievska, 'informing people about the environment and helping companies meet their deadlines.'

ZELENIKOVO-PETROVEC

The fruits of cooperation



Zlatko Acevski is a 23-year-old electrical engineer from Petrovec, a rural municipality on the outskirts of Skopje. He recently decided to start his own business growing kiwi fruit. He collected essential information on how to apply for additional funds at a recent training session on

What has been achieved?

The programme has successfully initiated 26 partnerships involving 62 municipalities.

A comprehensive training programme was provided for more than 800 municipal officials – in the areas of urban planning, tax collection, local economic development and inspections. These civil servants now have increased knowledge and capacities to provide better services to their citizens.

Mayors are demonstrating a strong political will to engage in partnerships with neighbouring municipalities and are making financial contributions from their own municipal budgets.

entrepreneurship organized jointly by the municipalities of Petrovec and Zelenikovo. Zlatko is one of the 570,000 people who have already benefited from inter-municipal cooperation, implemented so far in 62 municipalities.

Inter-municipal cooperation has already brought tangible benefits for local administration and citizens in terms of enriched and improved IT-based services in such areas as tax collection, urban planning and financial management. And in addition to greater cost-effectiveness and better service provision, such co-operation has made it possible for municipalities, big and small, to get closer to local people and to reach out to even the most vulnerable groups.

‘Zelenikovo and Petrovec are two rural municipalities with lots of technical issues and it’s only through inter-municipal cooperation that we have been able to overcome this lack of capacity,’ says Dejan Dimitrovski, Local Economic Development Coordinator in the municipality of Zelenikovo. ‘With the grant we received through the UNDP project we organized training for interested citizens with experienced consultants, drafted a Strategy for Local Development, created a website in two languages and procured technical equipment. This makes us able to provide services to citizens from both municipalities, mainly in the area of advice and documentation for applying for EU and other funds, to help them increase their businesses or agricultural production.’

NEGOTINO-DEMIR KAPIJA

The light at the end of the tunnel

The logic could not be clearer: where one municipality has a gap in technical capacity and another has the expertise to help close that gap, inter-municipal cooperation is often the most cost-effective solution. But it takes initiative and collective will to set such cooperation in motion. And for this strategy to be sustainable, cooperation needs to be structured – organized within a legal framework. The synergy achieved by Demir Kapija and Negotino provides a good example of these principles in practice.

Decentralization reforms put the municipality of Demir Kapija under pressure to meet increased administrative responsibilities, especially in enforcing new standards of environmental protection and drawing up a Local Environmental Action Plan. It wasn’t long before the municipality came to see that building up its capacity in these areas was a pressing priority. But building such capacity alone requires technical expertise, additional staff, new software, extensive training – the list goes on ... and it all amounts to time and money and human resources that Demir Kapija did not have available. ‘We didn’t have the know-how to produce the LEAP,’ says Jovan Jovanov, municipality of Demir Kapija, ‘And we didn’t have an environmental inspector to carry out all the new legal regulations. The pressure to find a solution was growing intense.’

Negotino is a long-established municipality with a wealth of administrative

experience and technical expertise. Like all municipalities, Negotino has had to devote considerable resources to fulfilling the responsibilities that come with decentralization and new environmental legislation. Unlike Demir Kapija, though, Negotino has had greater resources to draw upon in facing these challenges. Such imbalances of capacity between neighbouring municipalities are common throughout the country, especially between urban and rural, large and small municipalities. Overcoming these imbalances is a key goal of UNDP's support for inter-municipal cooperation.

'When the opportunity came up to start some form of cooperation with UNDP support,' reports Jovanov, 'We saw the light at the end of the tunnel.'

With good will in both administrations, the two municipalities came together to identify those areas in which cooperation could best meet their most urgent needs and where synergy could achieve the greatest results in cost-effectiveness. 'The first priority we identified was to address the under-capacity of Demir Kapija in environmental protection and the elaboration of LEAPs,' says Jovanov, 'So we decided to set up a joint committee to help carry out these obligations on a mutual basis.'

With initial training provided in setting up a framework for cooperation, and with technical support for the development of an improved database on environmental protection and instruction in the use of improved software, the joint committee set about finding the best ways to cut the costs of implementing the provisions of the latest environmental legislation, including new laws on controlling noise pollution. 'One of the first things we did

An IMC Financing Scheme in the form of small grants was established to encourage similar initiatives. This grant scheme has two components: one for the replication of good practices and one for stimulating further innovations. This has led to improved administrative procedures, more efficient organizational structures and enhanced fiscal capacities in all 62 municipalities.

An IMC Knowledge Management System has been established, including an IMC web portal and a network of IMC practitioners. The network ensures that all stakeholders are continuously informed about best practices and the latest innovations. They gather on a regular basis to exchange knowledge and experience.

was to appoint a joint environmental inspector for both municipalities,' says Lolita Ristova, municipality of Negotino, 'Demir Kapija had no environmental inspector of its own, so the choice was either for Demir Kapija to take on and train up new staff or to find a way to share the resources we already had in Negotino. It wasn't a difficult choice.'

As well as avoiding the costs of recruiting and training new staff, participation in the initial project to set up inter-municipal cooperation has provided Negotino and Demir Kapija with a new database and new means and methods of updating that database. 'We have a much clearer picture of the environmental situation now in both municipalities,' says Lolita Ristova, 'And the upgraded database gives us a much stronger foundation for planning joint actions in the future. The equipment and the training we obtained through the project mean we can deal with new requirements much more easily – like with the noise pollution laws and the new obligations for drawing up the environmental action plans. The citizens of our municipalities can see the difference because it's they who'll enjoy a cleaner and safer environment as a result of our working together.'

One of the first actions of the joint committee was to raise awareness in Negotino and Demir Kapija of how the public would be affected by recent environmental legislation and to explain the positive aims of these reforms. In addition to this awareness-raising campaign, the committee provided information to help local companies go about complying with the new regulations.

'The guidelines we got from the municipalities made the process a great deal

less trouble,' says local entrepreneur Mr. Risto Petrov, the owner of a trade complex in Demir Kapija. 'Having access to a local inspector meant we could get through the paperwork much faster and meet all the deadlines.'

Increased capacity through shared resources, together with the many working skills gained through cooperation, has given Demir Kapija and Negotino a strong basis for sustained development.

RADOVIS-KONCHE

Winning hearts and minds

Local government works best when it reaches out to people and gains their active cooperation in the collective endeavor of improving local conditions for everyone. Winning over hearts and minds is key to boosting municipal tax revenue because the more that citizens understand the aims and see the positive consequences of paying their taxes, the more willing they are to comply with municipal charges and the more likely they are to pay within the deadlines.

'This is why we called our inter-municipal project *Equal Services for All Citizens*,' explains Mane Manev, project coordinator, municipality of Radovis, 'We want our citizens to see that we evaluate property taxes fairly and to see the consequences of our investments for them in the local infrastructure.'

For many of the villagers in the remoter areas of Radovis and Konche, infrastructural developments are a matter of urgency. In the village of Kalugerica, for example, locals have no clear running

water in their homes and need to collect water from the village spring. 'We went out on a joint visit to the village to talk to the people about taxes and municipal investment,' says Manev, 'And there was a lot of interest and a lot of questions – even from the children! One little boy, called Nexho, came with us as we visited the houses. Being there and talking to people over coffee, explaining the connection between taxes and investment as clearly as possible, really seemed to persuade them we meant business. In some cases this started a debate about the moral duty of paying taxes and citizens pointed out the unfairness of tax evasion. A woman they call 'Aunt' Spasija, for example, spoke up about the benefits they received from local government and how the cooperation project would help all the villagers: "If we're all going to benefit," she said, "Then we should all contribute equally." The help we got from the villagers meant we were able to identify a number of illegally constructed buildings whose owners paid no taxes. Once we had won their faith in our methods of tax estimation and shown them clear examples of investment in practice and our plans for the water supply, people came forward, without animosity but as a matter of fairness, to identify tax evaders.'

'In most of the villages we go to,' says Manev, 'the first questions we get are often about how we assess the property taxes. They want to know how their taxes are measured and of course they want to know how their money is spent. It's obvious that a lot of them are pleasantly surprised when they see we've come with the explicit intention of answering those questions. Being there in person, giving a face to local government that the people can connect with, has a re-

Strong partnerships have been built throughout this process. Ministries, state institutions, the Association of Local Governments and the donor community are all contributing in their own ways towards creating an even more favourable climate for successful inter-municipal cooperation.

Today the country is a leader in the region when it comes to inter-municipal cooperation.

The valuable experiences and lessons learnt are already being shared with Montenegro, Moldova and the Ukraine. This exchange of experience between countries and regions will certainly be another great asset for the country's EU integration process.

Most importantly, inter-municipal cooperation has reached out to more than 800,000 people and 200,000 households throughout the country – many of whom previously had very limited access to basic services.

ally positive effect. Sitting and talking with a group of women in Koxhalija, for example, you get to hear their priorities and their experience of the municipality. And soon they come forward and start to explain how this or that family have never received tax decisions/bills.

Joint tax estimation is just one of the projects that Radovis and Konche have been carrying out since 2009 as part of their inter-municipal cooperation programme with the support of UNDP. In their work on the ground, the joint team for tax estimation has demonstrated what it means to bring local government closer to people.



