

Social Sustainability & Citizen Engagement

Urban Partnership Program II

Elbasan

City Synthesis Report

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Elbasan

City Synthesis Report

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Introduction

As part of the World Bank Group-Austria Partnership Program for Strengthening Local Governments in South-Eastern-Europe countries, the World Bank Social Development Unit has developed a Social Sustainability and Citizen Engagement (SSCE) Initiative, which continues and expands on the successful approach of the social sustainability assessments undertaken in phase I of the Urban Partnership Program. These assessments addressed two dimensions of socially sustainable and inclusive urban development:

- *Social Accountability and Participation* to increase accountability in the delivery of services and programs and empower urban marginalized and vulnerable groups to participate in their cities' development; and
- Proactively addressing the challenges of *Marginalization* to identify the needs of socially excluded groups and associated inequalities.

The initiative aimed to increase knowledge and awareness about citizen engagement (CE) mechanisms among stakeholders, including vulnerable groups. The first phase of the project involved five pilot cities in four countries in South Eastern Europe (SEE): Banja Luka (BiH), Durrës (Albania), Pristina (Kosovo), Sarajevo (BiH) and Skopje (FYR of Macedonia). The SSCE Initiative in UPP II builds upon the lessons and best practices that emerged during the first phase of the UPP, enhances the focus on the Citizen Engagement (CE) component, and expands its scope to include seven countries, and nine cities in this second cohort.

Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development in Tirana and the Institute for International Urban Development (I2UD) in Cambridge, Massachusetts have assembled a team of local experts to carry out research and fieldwork in this second phase in the following cities: Elbasan (Albania), Gjiçan (Kosovo), Kumanovo (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Karlovac (Croatia), Ulcinj and Kolasin (Montenegro), Pancevo and Sabac (Serbia).

Phase 1 of this project resulted in detailed, analytical reports of each of the nine cities covering demographic, social, physical, economic, cultural, institutional and political issues. The results of this research are summarized in **Section 1 – City Profile**. The full reports are available upon request. During this initial stage, the city teams also identified vulnerable groups to be the focus of the second phase of the assessment. This selection was made on the basis of official information obtained from institutions responsible for the provision of various public services at a local level, findings from research studies made by international and national organizations, as well as other relevant documents (laws, provisions, local development strategies, etc.) and representatives from marginalized and vulnerable communities and NGOS consulted during the inception phase.

Phase 2 involved extensive fieldwork and consultation with community members and other stakeholders. Each city team carried out a multiple Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). The FGDs were held with each vulnerable group, often with men and women separated for part of the discussion. The teams also conducted FGDs with NGO representatives. The questionnaires used to conduct these discussions are available upon request. Focus group participants were recruited through a public call advertised via mailing lists and social networks

and in cooperation with local grassroots NGOs that work with the identified vulnerable communities. In-Depth Interviews were carried out with at least two representatives of three of the following groups of stakeholders: local government representatives, the business sector, and the NGO sector. Local Government Associations were also consulted and interviewed in the process.

Section 2 provides a summary overview of the issues raised during the FGDs and IDIs. The summary is organized according to the three themes covered during the FGDs:

- Social Inclusion vis-à-vis Service Provision;
- Existing levels of social accountability and citizen engagement; and
- Opportunities and constraints for social accountability and citizen engagement.

For Phase 3, a Participatory Scenario Development (PSD) Workshop was held in Elbasan on July 20, 2016. The objectives of the PSD workshop were to:

- Raise awareness of the results of the previous two phases;
- Provide recommendations for the local government authorities, the wider civil society and intermediaries, i.e. NGOs, CBOs; and
- Map out solutions to reinforce socially sustainable city development and integrity in public services.

The workshop brought together stakeholders from multiple sectors and engaged them in identifying locally relevant pathways of autonomous and planned *change (improvements)* in the context of social accountability, sustainability and good governance.

The participants were encouraged to envision a future scenario for the introduction of various social accountability and social inclusion mechanisms. As a result, stakeholders developed a 'sense of ownership' for the scenarios. Particular focus was placed on the use of ICT tools for drafting socially inclusive accountability initiatives. **Section 3** builds on the scenarios agreed on by the workshop participants, as well as their recommended detailed actions for implementation, and suggests three key interventions to set the City of Elbasan on a path towards greater accountability and citizen engagement.

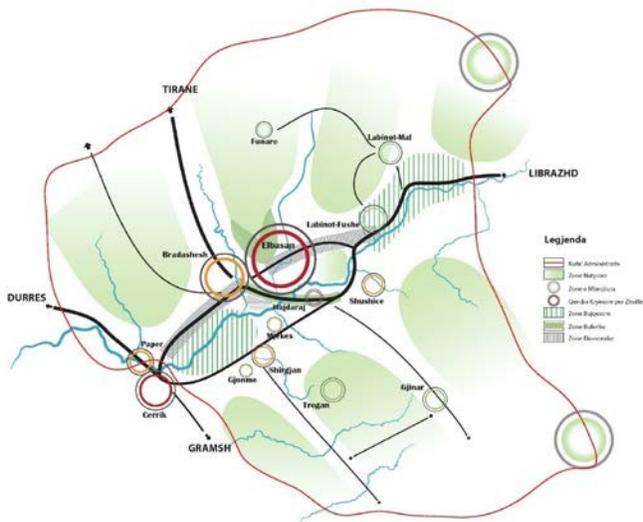
Two Annexes are included in this City Report. **Annex 1** presents the concept and application of the SSCE Index. Despite efforts to harmonize the Index application and disaggregate data among different respondents, each city collected data differently, resulting in findings that are not able to be read comparatively across cities. Findings nonetheless offer an evidence base for decision makers in each city analyzed. **Annex 2** provides a representation of the questions that constitute the questionnaire distributed in the participating cities. Different colors represent different pillars or categories both horizontally and vertically. Horizontal scores represent the different aspects of Citizen Engagement (CE) including willingness and capacity on the demand side, willingness and capacity on the supply side, and feedback and monitoring. Read horizontally, the matrix gives a Citizen Engagement “pulse” on different sectors that correlate to other components of the Urban Partnership Program.

1 City Profile

1.1 General City Profile

Elbasan is a city and a municipality, which lies in the central part of Albania and is part of Elbasan *Qark*, one of 12 administrative districts of Albania. Standing on the Shkumbin River, the municipality is traversed by multiple tributaries that supply the Shkumbin River, culminating with the Zaranika branch, which runs through the city (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of Elbasan Municipality



According to official data from the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), the current population of the Municipality of Elbasan is 144,382 inhabitants (INSTAT, calculated data for 2015), residing in a total area of

872.03 km² (State Authority for Geospatial Information-ASIG, 2015). Following the latest administrative and territorial reform, the population of the municipality has nearly doubled (the total population of the former municipality was 78,703 according to the last national Census of 2011) and the total surface has been increased to roughly 39 times its previous size. The region possesses many touristic attractions: more than 69 cultural monuments, many castles, one clock tower in Elbasan city center, and more than 15 cult objects, mosaics, etc. (data provided by

Elbasan Municipality upon request, 2015). However, despite strong tourism potential, such opportunities have not been fully exploited, catered to or promoted.

The territorial area of the municipality and the current administrative borders were established during 2015 as a result of the national governmental reform (Territorial and Administrative Reform – TAR), which involved the merger of 12 former communes with the former Municipality of Elbasan (Elbasan City). Following the Administrative and Territorial Reform, the former communes changed into administrative units, except for Elbasan (the former municipality before the reform), which still preserves its title as a city. The substantial changes in size and population pose multiple challenges for the administration of the territory, service provision and representation.

The Municipality of Elbasan constitutes the most important demographic, administrative and economic constituencies of Elbasan *Qark*. The resident population of the municipality is concentrated mainly in the City of Elbasan, (approximately 56% of the municipal population), while the rest of the population resides in the other administrative units. The most significant minority groups are the Roma and Egyptian populations living in this city with respectively 0.68% and 0.14 % of inhabitants for the total population (INSTAT, Census 2011).

An analysis of the age structure in the Municipality of Elbasan demonstrates that the average age of the population is very young, similar to the national average. Around 69% of the population (or

around 100,000 people) in the Elbasan Municipality belong to the 15 to 64 age-group, a demographic that is also considered to be the economically active age-group (INSTAT, Census 2011).

The workforce in Elbasan municipality is relatively less qualified than the workforces in other municipalities (29.9% of the population has completed secondary education compared to 31.4% nationally; 10.8% have completed university or post-university degrees compared to 11.8% nationwide) and thus renders the municipality less competitive in the national labor market. Around 27.7% of the working population is employed in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector; 20.9% in the industrial sector and 51.4% in the service sector. The majority of employees in the service sector (around 49%) reside in the urban area of the municipality, which consists mainly of the City of Elbasan. The population living in other administrative areas are largely employed in the agricultural sector.

According to the official data from INSTAT (Census 2011), among the major worker groups, the unemployment rates for adult men (29.6%), adult women (36.3%), and youth of 15-24 years old (54.6%) are higher if compared to corresponding unemployment rates at the national level. The youth unemployment rate is notably high in the Municipality of Elbasan, demonstrating that more than half of the active population aged 15-24 are unemployed. This tendency is also consistent with regional and national trends. However, unemployment rates are not similar in each administrative unit of Elbasan Municipality.

1.2 Institutional Challenges of Reform for Local Governance

In January 2015, the Albanian government established the National Agency for the Implementation of the Territorial and Administrative Reform (TAR) and a transitory fund of 13.2 million EUR for the implementation of the reform was distributed to the 61 newly established municipalities (Albanian EC Progress Report 2015). The new territorial organization aims to empower the new municipalities by enhancing their capability to provide high quality and timely services to citizens and increase the efficiency of local governments' resource management. The law on territorial planning was amended in October 2014 and the central and local governments of Albania have already started the process of preparing territorial plans on local, regional, sectorial and national levels.

Some of the challenges that Albanian municipalities face today are inherited, but are also closely related to the new territorial reform. With the expansion of the territory (ranked seventh in the country in terms of size), the Municipality of Elbasan will have to provide services to a population about 1.8 times larger than before. In these circumstances, the municipality faces: the need for both adequate urban planning and suitable rural development; increased demand for service delivery (increasing the range of services as well as the diversification of the type of services provided due to the urban and rural character of the new municipality); and an expansion of responsibilities (education, forests, secondary network of drainage and irrigation, etc.).

With a larger territory to administer, staff must be trained to coordinate actions for 13 constituent units of the municipality. The challenge of low financial transfers to and revenues of municipalities highlights the need of the municipality to improve the ability to collect revenues, particularly taxes and fees such as the property tax, tax of green cleaning, over a wider territory. Beyond developing a comprehensive inventory of prevention or rehabilitation projects, the municipality needs to

simultaneously cooperate with other municipalities, central institutions and environmental entities to protect the territories from pollution caused beyond its borders.

In terms of civic participation through NGOs and CBOs, it should be mentioned that most of the local organizations operate within the borders of the City of Elbasan (the borders of the former municipality of Elbasan before the reform) and lack representation from the newly added administrative units following the TAR. The NGO sector should reflect the changes following the TAR and expand the scope and their radius of action over the entire territory of the municipality.

Even in light of the TAR, social accountability and citizen engagement in the Municipality of Elbasan continue to be underpinned by two important laws: Law No. 146/2014 “On public informing and consultation” and Law No. 119/2014 “On the right to information”. The first law regulates the process of public information and the consultation of the drafts (national and local legal drafts) and local strategic documents or policies of high interest. The law establishes procedural rules to be applied to ensure transparency and public participation in policy-making processes and decision-making. The second law regulates the right to know information produced or held by public authorities. Both laws aim to promote transparency, accountability and integrity of public authorities. However, there is still need for a new law, which clarifies the functions and responsibilities of the local government units and increases their financial and administrative capacity.

1.3 Vulnerable Groups and Social Exclusion

The existing social services of the local governments in Albania are mostly focused on the provision of the Economic Aid (*Ndihma Ekonomike* in Albanian) and the payment of disability benefits. Practically, in Albania, social services are sporadic and exist in some large cities, but they are essentially dependent on donor funding and civil society projects, where non-governmental actors are the main providers; in rural areas such services are generally lacking. Overall the scheme of social services and social inclusion lack a clear legal framework and adequate budget (Albania EC Progress Report 2015). Based on some additions and amendments to Law No. 9355, dated on October 3rd, 2005, "On Social Aid and Services" and the "Social Protection Crosscutting Strategy 2007-2013 ", the social protection system within the Municipality of Elbasan jurisdiction consists of the cash payment systems for persons with disabilities and the provision of the “Economic Aid” for other categories; and the system of social services for vulnerable groups. Nominally, modifications to the social services system since 2007 are in full accordance with relevant national strategies and international guidelines and principles and in full compliance with the EU *acquis* on social protection and inclusion.

The Sector of Social Programming at the Municipality of Elbasan is a new integrated structure, which aims to cover all vulnerable groups (children, youth, women, disable people, elderly and ethnic minorities) in accordance with the respective national strategies and the Development Plan of the Elbasan Municipality. The Sector is composed of four units with one specialist per unit and has the following objectives: the Child Protection Unit (CPU) focuses on the healthy and safe development of children; the Disability Unit treats cases of disability and offers proper assistance and services for disable people; the Elderly and Ethnic Groups Unit takes care of the needs and

cases of the elderly and ethnic communities, mainly Roma and Egyptians; and the Gender Issues and Domestic Violence Unit handles cases of violence and issues related to gender.

At the same time, the implementation of policies on Roma inclusion remains inadequate at both the national and local level. The National Strategy 2015-2020 for the Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians is not yet implemented and the governmental action plans for the integration of these communities still remains to be adopted. Moreover, Albania has not yet adopted the European Charter for regional and minority languages, though in the primary school “Hamit Mullisi” in Elbasan Municipality, Roma language is offered as a language course for all students. Roma and Egyptians continue to face very difficult living conditions, a lack of social protection, lack of education, missing employment opportunities, and face everyday discrimination and different types of social exclusion.

In the Municipality of Elbasan, Roma constitute a considerable number of the total population. The official data for the municipality states that only 0.68% of the resident population is Roma, as of the 2011 census. However, according to the data from Sida Albania, in 2014, about 225 Roma households with 1075 members reportedly lived in the City of Elbasan. They are settled in Rrapishtë, near the stadium, near the hospital, and in other locations.

Elbasan Municipality has developed several concrete projects to fix and improve the infrastructure of the neighborhoods where Roma communities live, including improvements to roads, sewage systems, potable water facilities, and waste landfills, and involving Roma families in social housing schemes and soft loans scheme. The Municipality provides rolling assistance to the Roma community in completing the required documentation for various specifications, such as for housing, social assistance, or other services. Likewise, the municipality works in close collaboration with different local and international donors, associations, private and state institutions and many civil society actors to improve the living conditions of the Roma community, but also to raise awareness about their rights and foster their integration in line with their cultural identity. For instance, supported by UNDP, the Municipality of Elbasan built the Roma Community Centre in order to give proper access to education to Roma children and youngsters.

Furthermore, Elbasan Municipality is the only municipality in Albania that has two representatives from the Roma and Egyptian communities in the City Council who, despite political affiliations, serve the needs of their communities. More specifically, the municipality organizes “Technical Tables” (*Tryeza Teknike* in Albanian) to target vulnerable groups with specific problems, including Roma children. In terms of identifying and supporting Roma children, the Child Protection Unit of the municipality holds multidisciplinary meetings with institutions and NGOs to find suitable solutions for families and children.

Unlike the relatively high proportion of Roma in Elbasan, the number of persons with disabilities in the Municipality of Elbasan is almost the same as the national average. About 6.3% of the resident population of the Elbasan Municipality (or about 9,100 people) has declared to have at least one disability (INSTAT Census, 2011). The largest disability reported is the restriction on movement with 3.7% cases at the municipal level. Persons with disabilities still face difficulties in accessing education, housing, legal aid, employment, healthcare and social service.¹

¹ EC Progress Report, Albania 2015, pg. 48
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1.4 Social Accountability and Citizen Engagement Practices

The Municipality of Elbasan conducts participatory budgeting and gender budgeting in six regions within the City of Elbasan and in 12 other administrative units. The budget consultation with the citizens of Elbasan is a practice of participatory budgeting that has been part of the municipal practice since 2005 in the former municipality of Elbasan (before the implementation of the TAR). For the first time, the participatory budgeting practice took place in the 12 newly added administrative units of the Elbasan Municipality for the 2016 budget consultations. Moreover, from 2009, the budget has been drafted on gender-specific considerations. In this way, the participatory budgeting is synonymous with gender budgeting, reflecting specific needs and insights of men and women in the Municipality of Elbasan.

Additionally, there is an active consultation process for involving the residents, and specifically vulnerable groups in city strategies and planning decisions. There was considerable attendance at the public hearings during the drafting process of the Local Strategy for Territorial Development and the General Local Territory Plan by different stakeholders. The process followed the formal practice of incorporating all comments and feedback received from citizens into the first drafts of the following documents. Moreover, all the changes and reflections deriving from these consultations can be followed in an extensive report, which can be found on the website of the municipality or on the websites and social media accounts of different civil society organizations and donors.

Another valuable mechanism of participation is the Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP). CAP provides a forum to discuss and articulate key issues of municipal development, consult with municipal officials and staff concerning many topics and exchange ideas for improving local governance. The municipality also has an “open window” for everyone who has studied or worked abroad in the country to bring their professional or academic expertise and contribute to specific policy developments for Elbasan Municipality.

Citizen satisfaction surveys cover a substantial range of topics such as: the assessment of cleaning services, good management of green surfaces, potable water services, administration of the sewage system, etc. The questionnaires can be found online, on the municipality’s website and are easily accessible and user friendly. In the same way, the municipality posts the responses on the webpage. These questionnaires, however, appear to be very old (from 2012) and there is no information regarding if they take place annually or if they are repeated with any frequency. Moreover, most of the questionnaires have a low response rate (10 to 15 people). There is no online or accessible report from the municipality addressing whether or not it has reflected on the results of the surveys or the way it has impact decision-making on the raised issues.

Elbasan Municipality, together with three other pilot municipalities (Berat, Kamza and Vlora) and in partnership with USAID and UN Woman Albania, implemented a Community-Based Scorecard (CBS) project during the 2015 election campaign.² The scorecards use citizen feedback to assess municipality performance in the areas of quality of services, good governance and transparency, economic development, human rights and gender equality, and are an opportunity for municipalities to understand citizens’ priorities and needs.

In terms of incorporating ICT mechanisms in improving service delivery and increasing citizen participation, Elbasan Municipality is one of the first municipalities which, in collaboration with UNDP, has successfully developed the municipality’s website and the e-participation platform.

² It is still unclear if CBS will be still used as a municipal practice for the everyday work of the municipality or be limited exclusively to the electoral process.

The Municipality of Elbasan also uses other ICT tools such as e-newsletters, periodic gazettes, social media, etc.

The Electronic Document Management System (EDMS), implemented with the support of UNDP allows several municipal processes to be carried out more efficiently, such as the registry and handling of correspondence, archiving, citizens' requests and complaints, communication with the citizens.³ In addition, the E-Participation Portal⁴ was designed to enable citizens at the municipal level to participate in consultation processes such as: budgeting, urban planning, service delivery, etc. It offers more information to citizens, which represents another instrument of interaction. It is also a tool that can help increase the transparency to the citizens; Citizens in the Municipality of Elbasan have one more important alternative to get involved in processes that concern administration, policymaking, decision-making, through various functionalities of the Portal, such as polls, questionnaires, forums, e-voting, etc.

There is an online system for tracking the responsiveness to grievances of various departments/service providers through both the municipality website and the e-participation platform. Citizens can request information or any other type of accessible service through the online system and the municipality has to publish the official response online. Furthermore, citizens can fill out complaint forms and send them electronically through the municipality's website or physically at the municipality's information center/front desks. They can follow the response from the municipality by using a particular ID number, which they receive when filling out the complaint.

The municipality's website⁵ is user-friendly, updated in many areas and offers a wide range of information. However, in order to be more effective and transparent, the website should be updated more frequently not only regarding activities, the agenda and general notifications, but also on very sensitive issues, such as information related to public procurements, funding and grants from international or local donors, etc. Along with the introduction of ICT and networking in the new administrative units, there is a great need for training in order for to use technology as a tool of improving governance and increasing citizens' participation in the decision making process.

Other ICT mechanisms used by the municipality include Local TV and radio channels and social media. The municipality has a Facebook account⁶, Twitter account⁷ and Youtube Channel⁸. In general, the official Facebook page of the Municipality is updated in a timely manner and presents real-time events, provides updated information or official calls and can be considered fairly active in communicating with citizens. Meanwhile, the YouTube Channel provides a large range of videos covering different topics and issues. A public information and communication campaign is implemented to inform the citizens of Elbasan about ways that they can engage more directly in policy-making processes of the municipality and using the online portal or social media.

³ UNDP, 2013-Information and Communication Technology – for a better governance in Albania, Accessed on January 2016

⁴ www.e-pjesemarrje.gov.al/elbasani

⁵ www.elbasani.gov.al

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/Bashkia-Elbasan-182621045114200/?fref=ts>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/BashkiaElb>

⁸ YouTube Channel Municipality of Elbasan:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy7cmlbZehhDmY8Scqmy4fA?feature=mhee>

1.5 Access of Public Services

In terms of housing, the latest development trends and the private construction market generally fulfill the accommodation needs for everyone who can afford market prices and is in need of accommodation. However, there are an increasing number of families in need of accommodation who cannot afford the market price. By the end of 2011, around 1,772 housing requests were identified, out of which 1,276 were from families coming from vulnerable groups. Although the budgetary allocations for housing for Roma and Egyptians have tripled, they still remain insufficient to address the real needs of these communities (EC Progress Report Albania, 2015). In addition, with the economic crises and the construction crisis of 2008, a large amount of the housing stock is still vacant in the municipality.

In terms of education, the radius of service for the 97 kindergartens, 127 primary schools, 23 high schools in the Municipality of Elbasan covers moderately well the whole territory of Elbasan City. However, the 12 other administrative units are only partially covered by kindergartens and schools. In fact, the high school dropout rates are higher for these administrative units (INSTAT, Census 2011). Access to education is not only lower if compared to Elbasan City, but it is also jeopardized by the poor economic conditions and infrastructure.

The health care institutions of the Municipality of Elbasan consist of one general and regional hospital, one national psychiatric hospital, 14 health centers and 81 clinics/counseling centers. In the Municipality of Elbasan, one doctor serves around 1,266 residents⁹. In the other administrative units of the municipality, lack of medical staff and hospital beds is even more of a concern. The disturbing data on high infant mortality rates in the Municipality of Elbasan (10.8 deaths/1,000 births) have a significant explanatory power in revealing the general picture of the conditions of health institutions (hygiene, infrastructure, healthcare facilities, accessibility, and hospital equipment), level of education and accessible information for pregnant mothers.

Water supply Services offered in the City of Elbasan covers about 100% of the surface of the city. However, about 30,330 inhabitants in the rural area of the municipality of Elbasan currently do not have a constructed water supply system (data provided by Municipality of Elbasan upon request, 2015). Administrative units facing difficulties in terms of meeting the demand for water appear to be *Gjinar, Shushicë, Tregan, Shirgjan, Gjergjan, Funarë, Gracen* and *Labinot Mal*.

According to the data from INSTAT (Census, 2011), for the Elbasan Municipality, only 10% of private households possess an Internet connection, compared with 12.3% at the national level. Also, when comparing the ratio of private households possessing a computer, only 16.9% of households in the Municipality of Elbasan own a computer, in contrast with 20.1% of households nationwide. The ratio of households with Internet access is particularly low in other administrative units of the municipality including Funarë, Gjinar, Labinot Fushë, and Labinot Mal. Data from the 2011 census reveals that in the administrative unit of Gracen, no private households have access to Internet.

Overall, around 97% of the inhabited territory in the municipality of Elbasan is covered by waste collection services. However, despite the suitable area of coverage, service quality is lacking, as the collection procedures and vehicles are fairly dated. Following the TAR, the Municipality of Elbasan also faces challenges stemming from the specific ways that each of the former communes has of organizing services (private or public) and their relevant infrastructure.

The general conditions of the roads in the municipality are poor and lag behind European standards. Around 79 places with poor infrastructure and a lack of security measures within the

⁹ Data from Municipality of Elbasan
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Municipality of Elbasan have been identified as sources of accidents (Co-PLAN, 2015).

The majority of the population relies on the use of their own vehicles, which in turn generates traffic congestion. The Strategic Development Plan of the City for the years 2010-2020 has recommended the expansion of public transport with three new bus lines in order to increase the territorial reach by at least 50%, ensuring better coverage for the whole city.

2 Summary of Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews

The Elbasan City Team organized a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) during the second phase of the SSCE project (June 2016). FGDs were held with representatives from the Citizen Advisory Panels, NGO sector and different citizens (unemployed, low and middle income employed, youth and ethnic minorities). The City Team also conducted four In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with representatives from national and local governments, relevant government agencies and institutions, university professors and business sector representatives.

In total, 40 citizens (13 men and 27 women) took part in the FGD activities. Based on the purpose of the focus group discussions, the key list of attributes for the participants included age, gender, employment status, and income and education level. Using this list of attributes, participants were identified and contacted. A detailed script was prepared, outlining the structure of discussions, with a list of key questions and instructions for the facilitators as well as information (examples) on social accountability methods used by civic groups (civic activities). Based on the ToR requirements (and in order to be more effective), the focus group questions were regrouped (starting with more general open-ended questions and moving to more specific questions) and reformulated according to each group of participants.

The focus group discussions were planned to last approximately two hours. The work was structured in three parts: an introductory period, group discussion and closing remarks. After introductions, aimed at explaining the purpose of the discussion, participants discussed the pre-selected questions. Later, in order to compare standpoints and share their comments, participants were asked to briefly present their remarks and discuss them together.

2.1 Existing Social Accountability and Citizen Engagement Levels

Following the desktop research template, the responses, perceptions and opinions of the participants have been grouped into the two pillars of *demand* and *supply* of governance, intersecting with the themes of participation, transparency, and feedback.

Regarding the current levels of social sustainability, citizen engagements and interaction through various communication channels, the responses from the focus groups held in the Municipality of Elbasan were noticeably different depending on the target group's particularities. For instance, the members of the Citizens Advisory Panel (CAP) argued that because of their frequent communication with municipal offices and authorities, they have been able to get most of the information they look for on the official website of the municipality and in the municipal offices. CAP's members are active participants in public consultations and hearings, participatory budget meetings and public gathering and discussions, since they are elected by the citizens of Elbasan and represent their demands and opinions. Representatives from NGOs have also agreed that there is a substantial amount of accessible information on the municipality website and they often refer to it for their daily activities. However, they all agreed that the webpage should be updated more frequently and designed to be more user-friendly.

During the discussions, concerns were raised that reports kept during public consultation or participatory budget exercises are not accessible online as required by law. The public is interested to see how the recommendations and citizens' remarks are reflected and accommodated in local policies or documents, though currently this is not possible. The focus group participants argued that even though the weekly newspaper of the municipality is a very good mechanism for informing the citizens on the latest development within the municipality, its coverage is limited only to the City of Elbasan and is not distributed to the other administrative units, despite the fact that it is also accessible on the municipality website. However, some respondents said that they

had never received the printed newspaper, but heard about its existence. The weekly newspaper of the municipality “Almanaku” is distributed free of charge in the City of Elbasan and seeks not only to inform citizens of the public affairs of the city, but also invite them to participate in public hearings and consultations.

The existing communication channels leveraged by the municipality include the municipal website (comprising a number of mechanisms such as e-participation, service satisfaction questionnaires, requests for information/complaints, forms to report a wrongdoing, etc.); one-stop-shop offices for each administrative unit; participatory budgeting and gender budgeting practices in six regions within the City of Elbasan and 12 other administrative units; open hearings and public consultations; and television programs and print media, such as the weekly newspaper of the municipality “Almanaku” and the annual report “*Pasazh* - An overview of the annual administrative procedures,” among others.

The FGDs revealed that not all of the current communication channels are known by citizens and consequently the local government should play a more salient role in raising awareness about the existing communication channels or the role and responsibilities of the local government in providing information in a timely and accessible manner.

When asked how those who do not use computers and internet (for example the elderly, illiterate people, vulnerably poor and marginalised citizens, those who don’t know how to use/can’t afford to have computers and access to the internet) could get access to information, participants suggested that besides ICT tools, authorities should also use the traditional channels of communication to inform citizens about the services they provide and other information on public affairs.

2.2 Opportunities and Constraints for Social Accountability and Engagement

The Municipality of Elbasan has a very large territory, with many remote villages, which are not reached by ICT. Many of the participants said that in addition to the website and other ICT tools, the Municipality of Elbasan should rely more on *One-Stop-Shop* practices, TV channels, newspapers, billboard announcements, phone calls/SMS, and other “low-tech” communication practices to provide information about services, public consultations, notifications and other programmes offered by the national and local governments. Representatives from municipal departments said that they could increase their efforts in notifying vulnerable groups, such as the Roma community, homeless people, unemployed, woman in difficulty, people with disabilities, and others on public hearings and consultations, especially when the topic discussed is directly related to their social or economic situation.

The “Aleksandër Xhuvani” University – an important institution of science and education and one of the most well-known universities in the country for the preparation of teachers, specialists and young researchers in the fields of human and natural sciences, economics, informatics and medical studies – is located in the Municipality of Elbasan. The City Team tried to understand if the university, as an important actor in the public life of the city, is engaged at any level in the decision- making process or if it has the ability and power to inform and influence the development of local policies. From discussions with students and professors from the university and consultations with the municipality staff, it was clear that cooperation between the university and the municipality is very limited. The young students, who participated in the FGDs, expressed that their knowledge about municipal activities, services,

projects, expenditures is poor and insufficient. Most of them had never accessed the municipality's website and had only occasionally visited its Facebook page. In the same way, they had almost never filed a complaint about municipal performance or requested any type of official information. Some of them have visited the City Hall or contacted a staff member when engaged in projects or activities. This is at some point explained by the fact that most of the youngsters in Albania live with their parents until they create their own families, so they express most of their concerns about service provision through their parents. However, when asked if they or their parents or acquaintances have participated in public hearings or meetings, or in participatory budget sessions, only a few were familiar with the terms and almost no one had heard of someone they knew participating in these public gatherings.

Overall, students were unable to say if the information provided by the municipality is accessible, clear, reliable and informative, because they had almost never used it. However, even though they had never searched or asked for information, they said that they do not trust government officials and publicly-displayed information. They do not trust that the local government can resolve citizens' real problems and listen to their opinions when making important decisions. This was a prominent opinion among the participations, emphasizing once more that the level of trust of citizens in public authorities and initiatives is relatively low. Participants from all FGDs were unanimous in their conclusions that there is general feeling of apathy and passiveness of citizens, and that they need to be more proactive in demanding governments and institutions in charge information in order for them to become more responsible and accountable in relation to their functions.

There are some internship opportunities for students within the municipality, which, if further consolidated, can significantly improve cooperation between institutions. Even though it was clear that both parties do not consider the cooperation as fully-satisfying and a successful one, when asked if they would like to strengthen the cooperation and if the university would like to engage in helping the municipality to enhance the use of ICT in service provision, both institutions expressed interest for future collaboration.

Albania is in the process of implementing two important laws (approved in the end of 2014): "On the right to information" and "On public notifications and consultations." Many of the participants from the FGDs, including representatives of the municipality, concluded that the local governments in Elbasan and elsewhere in Albania are legally required to be accountable to their citizens and provide public information (as specified in the law and other guidelines) and involve citizens in decision-making following procedures and mechanisms as mentioned in the legal framework. Overall, the Municipality of Elbasan fulfils the main requirements of the law, but still has to consolidate some of its practises and enforce all of the laws' requirements. Fortunately, the municipality itself is aware of its challenges in implementing the laws and is in the process of strengthening its capacities and inter-institutional cooperation.

All participants, from each of the FGDs, agreed that the Municipality should develop and improve the one-stop-shop offices. Currently, there are six offices operating in the City of Elbasan, four in the administrative unit of Bradashesh and one in each of the 11 remaining administrative units of the municipality. Everyone recognized the importance of this office as a highly effective tool for interaction between municipal structures and citizens. However, these structures are relatively new and face many challenges. A considerable number of staff (approximately 54 employees) are responsible for providing first-hand information and collecting citizens' complaints and requests. NGOs and representatives from the departments within the municipality agree that there is a need to increase human and infrastructural capacities. Currently, the one-stop-shop software is established only for the City of Elbasan and the administrative unit of Bradashesh.

allowing for a fast interaction between the central administration of the municipality and the administrative unit. However, the system is not yet operational and the implementation of it in other administrative units of the municipality is very costly and not feasible in a short time period. In these conditions, people living at the periphery of the municipality are the most vulnerable regarding service provision, participatory opportunities and in getting timely and accurate information.

2.3 In-Depth-Interviews

The field research included also five in-depth interviews, with experts from the central and local government and civil society organizations. The purpose of these interviews was to deepen the research and validate the findings from the desktop research and FGDs. Interviews examined the current levels of social accountability in local government, and in the Municipality of Elbasan in particular; overall challenges; and ways of improving the effectiveness of communication channels and civic engagement.

The City Team conducted in depth interviews with the following respondents:

Ardita Shehaj, Head of the Right to Information Department, the Commissioner for information and data protection

Diamanta Vito, Head of Economic and Strategic Development Department, Municipality of Elbasan

Gentjan Sejrani, Executive Director, Egyptian and Roma Youth Movement

Aida Uruçi, Information Coordinator, Municipality of Elbasan

Aida Cacaj, Legal Officer, Albanian Association of Municipalities

Elior Vila, Head of Informatics Department, Aleksandër Xhuvani University

Adelina Farrici, Association for Local Autonomy

The representative of the Commissioner on the Right to Information and Data Protection emphasized the importance of the law "On the right to information" as a guarantor of the fundamental right of the citizen to access all the information of public content, if it does not violate the principles of protection of personal data. However, in the Albanian context, the level of implementation at local institutions and municipalities of the country remains particularly low.

Among the 61 municipalities in the country, only 24 have established active, official web pages and from all these, only eight have formally met the requirements under the law. Even the existing published programs of transparency are not of a very high quality, though there are ongoing efforts by all public institutions to improve. The main difficulties faced by municipalities in the country are related to the administrative-territorial reform (TAR) and the lack of staff capacity. It is worth emphasizing however that municipalities or institutions do not resort to refusing information to the public. In most cases they simply neglect incoming requests for information, unless contacted by the Commissioner, in which case they submit the information upon request. Moreover, in almost all of the monitored cases, the information requested does not contain sensitive content, which suggests that municipalities have no reason to hide or deny it. Also, for well-known reasons, there is lack in human and institutional capacities for the implementation of the law, as are also isolated cases, which demonstrate a lack of will for transparent governance.

According to representatives from the municipality, Municipality of Elbasan tries to make full use of partnerships with local organizations to access their networks and expertise and reach people who are marginalized in the community. Some of the current tools used to support public participation in local government, are ICT-related programs, participatory budgeting, public

hearings and consultations, one-stop-shop offices, periodic publications, charrettes, surveys, focus groups, and media, among others. The municipality's goal is to extend new relationships with the public through assessing local needs, integrating these needs into the decision making process, and developing ways to engage those affected into meaningful solutions. For the Municipality of Elbasan the most effective way to provide information is through the one-stop-shop offices and local newspapers, radio and television stations. Wherever possible, information is disaggregated by gender, race, age, income, ethnicity, and other relevant socio-economic factors.

These communication means are effective choices for reaching out to the public and should be extended to the entire territory of the municipality, including the most remote villages. Regarding one-stop-shop offices, many emerging problems were pointed out, mainly because these are newly-formed structures and their consolidation has been slow. There is an emergent need for staff training and coordination for all one-stop-offices operating in Elbasan Municipality. Moreover, the offices in the administrative units are not fully equipped with the necessary equipment and ICT, which would make communication with the municipal administration more effective and quick, improving thus the direct connection with each of the administrative units' residents. Also, when asked about enforcement of the Law on the Right to Information and Public Consultation, Mrs. Diamanta Vito and Aida Urupi (Coordinator on the Right to Information) explained that the Municipality of Elbasan is trying to fulfil all legal requirements within a very short timeframe. They have already started the process and have complied with most of the obligations, but are aware that the process requires extensive coordination efforts. Both representatives from the municipality expressed their disappointment with the low number of responses regarding the satisfaction questionnaires (frequently updated) and the low turnout of people in public consultations, even though the municipality notifies citizens one month in advance, using all communication channels. However, based on consultations with experts, civil society organizations and citizens, a new webpage, which is more user-friendly and suits the needs of the community is in the process of construction.

Representative of the Roma Youth Movement NGO described the manifold problems that Roma and Egyptians face in the Municipality of Elbasan, related to housing, living conditions, registration, health care, education, and employment. It was highlighted the poor interaction and communication history between the local government and vulnerable groups such as Roma and Egyptian people in contributing to the current situation of these communities. According to him, Roma and Egyptians are excluded from decision-making processes, as they are not adequately notified about participating in public meetings and when they do participate their opinions are rarely taken into consideration. Since most of the Roma and Egyptians have limited access to ICT, they do not receive information on time.

Asked about the experience of Roma people when having problems with getting certain services, it was mentioned that there is a general impression that individually Roma people can do very little or close to nothing to change municipal practices or inefficiencies by making complaints. Most of them are not familiar with some of the mechanisms available to citizens to complain when having problems with certain services. If they need something, it is quicker and easier to use informal communication channels. Most of them resolve their problems through intermediaries, such as local NGOs. However, many in this community deeply distrust public institutions as well as certain NGOs, since they consider that most of the time, they do not conduct activities in the best interest of Roma people, but in their own interest.

Aleksander Xhuvanui University has not been involved in any form in the decision-making practices at the local level or in any other issue that has to do with aspects of public life of the City of Elbasan, according to the interview of a representative of the university. Indeed, there are some

lecturers who are members of the Municipal Council and represent different political parties, but they do not represent the interest of the university. The Department of Informatics has not had any collaboration with public authorities that could lead to concrete actions in relation to improvement of citizens' access to public services. They have never been invited from public authorities or other actors to discuss how the ICT department can contribute to improve service provision by considering the use of IT resources or the harnessing of ICT to foster transparency and open governance. The university has not been part of any discussion table or agenda on these related issues. In the past, there have been some ideas for cooperation regarding the commitment of the department to provide support in areas related to IT but so far have remained purely at the informal level and have not been concretized.

There are two local government associations currently operating in Albania, the Albanian Association of Municipalities and the Association for Local Autonomy. Both they expressed the concern that Albanian municipalities, are currently facing crucial challenges even after a year and a half after from the last local elections and the new territorial division. These challenges relate to functional framework of municipalities (considering and still ongoing changes to domestic legislation), as well as the administration of the municipality. And all municipalities in the country have one common goal, to bring the services closer to the citizens. Recent legal changes (mainly referring to the Law on Local Government, but not limited to) provide mechanisms for citizen involvement, which are directly translated into obligations for municipalities. According to our experience, they are still far from full implementation.

This is because the mechanisms provided are not easily applicable and require financial and human resources by municipality and civic engagement itself from the other hand. More or less all municipalities have a coordinator for dispatching information, which in some cases overlaps another position, like performing community consultation sessions on the budget or issues of major interest, publish press council meetings etc. We cannot say that at the moment are being installed effective mechanisms for social accountability and citizen participation in national terms. We believe that municipalities still need time, resources and external assistance to address the issues and their internal reorganization, especially in administrative units, seen in the light of civic engagement. Overall, the levels of transparency are more satisfactory than those of accountability in the Albanian Municipalities. While pretty much all municipalities have the means of communication with the public, meetings, websites or social networks, newspapers, etc. The levels of accountability are still low, and not always because of political will.

Accountability does also require the commitment of citizens, who lack public interest, which go beyond personal concerns. Can the municipality promote this commitment? Undoubtedly, it can. Over many years, municipalities have implemented many projects that have had this purpose, however their results have not always been consistent over time. Municipalities should still identify effective ways of communication with citizens and adapt to different groups (especially the urban and rural population), to facilitate citizen participation and at the same time show clear willingness to listen to the citizen's voice. For i.e. meetings in rural areas can be a more effective communication tools than online interaction, etc. What it was found, during many years working with LGUs, is that the practice of administrative complaints in the municipality is weak. Municipal officials have little knowledge about the right of citizens to appeal to administrative acts issued by the municipality. However, last year after we have intensified a campaign on this, we have noticed an increase in knowledge of municipal employees on the processes.

Overall, the success of the municipalities is directly connected to the vision of the Mayor and the Council as the main decision-making entities at local level. Second, the success of accountability practices is related to the professionalism of municipal employees, their knowledge and capacity.

We think that municipalities need to implement some good practices for increasing citizen participation in decision making. For this, it is needed external assistance.

According to legal obligations, each municipality must have its web site, where decisions and notifications are made public to the citizens. Currently, not all municipalities have an internet page and many of the existing ones are not frequently updated. Social media is easier and more effective for the municipality and the citizens themselves, and it is being used extensively. There is no detailed data on the use of ICT tools on civic engagement, or applications (there is the case of the Municipality of Tirana), or other online surveys, however their usage is at early stage. These tools can be effective but should always be accompanied with other alternatives for people who do not have access to technology.

The Albanian Association of Municipalities has conducted many activities to address the issue of increasing transparency in local decision-making as participatory budgeting, a series of trainings with the Ombudsman for the respect of human rights at the local level, training for the right to information, increase the representation gender in the municipality, etc. Currently, there are not planned future initiatives on this topic.

Note: The City Team has drafted comprehensive individual report for each IDI, which can be made available upon request.

2.4 Conclusions and general remarks on the findings from FGDs and IDIs

Overall, the findings from the FGDs and IDIs largely confirmed and clarified (to some extent) the findings from the inception phase gathered through a desk review. It appears that FGD participants and IDI respondents have a good theoretical understanding of the concepts of transparency, accountability, accessible service provision and information systems, and the willingness for cooperation and engagement with the civic sector and civil society. However, in practice, both the demand and supply actors seems not to match. From the demand side, there is a clear lack of participation of every-day citizens in solving community problems at the local level. Ordinary citizens are not engaged with politics and they often lack information and knowledge about the issues. A lack of confidence in their ability to be effective, distrust in social and political institution, lethargy, and public dissatisfaction with current economic performance, are some of the key factors contributing to low levels of public engagement. On the supply side, local government has not been entirely successful in implementing the legal framework that seeks to enable greater information access and citizen participation, which would significantly improve the level of social accountability and engagement in Elbasan. Good communication between local government and citizens ameliorates mistrust and ill will. Thus, the local government should make a greater effort to facilitate people's inputs in the policy-making process. Because of the high cost of participation programs, the government should be more collaborative with non-governmental organizations, community leaders and various interest groups, including educational institutions.

3 Scenario Development Workshop Outcomes and Recommendations

The Participatory Scenario Development Workshop for the Municipality of Elbasan was conceptualized and organized as a joint event between Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development and the Municipality of Elbasan. The choice for this partnership was strategic given that the Municipality is currently in the process of reorganization after the Territorial and Administrative Reform, and is implementing the Territorial Development strategy (where social accountability plays a salient role). From the start of the process, the municipality was fully engaged in the project, trying to take ownership and responsibility for any of the project outcomes to follow, including the scenarios.

The event, which was held on July 20, 2016 on the premises of Hotel Skampa in the city of Elbasan, gathered approximately 50 participants representing local government institutions including the municipality, citizens of various professions and interests, and civil society representatives, including NGOs and CBOs.

Through the opening speech, the mayor, Mr. Qazim Sejдини highlighted the municipality's willingness and commitment to matters pertaining to social accountability, and touched on a number of ICT incentives adopted and implemented by the city to this end, that were described in Phase 1 in the Analytical Report.

The workshop agenda included an extensive presentation covering emerging findings of the social sustainability and citizen engagement assessment for the Municipality of Elbasan, related to social accountability aspects and the use of ICT; these were further elaborated through a number of examples offered from international best practices. The presentation was delivered by Co-PLAN experts, who were directly involved in the desk research, focus groups discussions and in-depth interviews held during May and June 2016, namely represented by the executive director Mr. Dritan Shutina, the project coordinator Ms. Aida Ciro, and researcher and public policy analyst Ingrid Xhafa. The three speakers covered the following issues:

- a. Greetings and presentation;
- b. Overall findings from preceding stages;
- c. Social accountability aspects, mechanisms, and main actors involved;
- d. Use of ICT for increased participation, transparency and overall accountability;
- e. Examples of how ICT has been used on an international level for increased social accountability;
- f. Moderation and presentation of the group work

A substantial part of the event was dedicated to participatory scenario development in three groups that addressed the major topics of the workshop: Demand (how to increase public awareness?); Supply (what can/should the Municipality do in light of the challenges arising from the implementation of the TAR?); and Interaction mechanisms (ICT & Traditional solutions to enable communication). These group sessions were followed by a plenary review. The approach adopted by the team was that of debating each of the scenarios based on criteria such as feasibility of the proposed action, implementation period, costs, etc. It is essential to note that the dynamics of the scenario development process exceeded the anticipated response and resulted in a very interactive and fruitful session.

All proposals brought forward during the workshop manifest *inter-related features of accountability*, which explains how and why a particular proposal, for instance proposal No.1, drives participation, yet also results in increased transparency, interaction, etc. Therefore, although

workshop findings were numerous, they have been organized into three main categories for optimal representation of the interests of the involved parties, optimal ownership when it comes to their implementation, and optimal harmonization of all interventions, as part of a major endeavor to increase social sustainability in the municipality.

The following summary outlines the proposals considered the strongest and most realistic initiatives that could catalyze a wider social accountability push in the Municipality of Elbasan.

3.1 Theme 1: What can/should the Municipality do in light of the challenges arising from the implementation of the TAR?

The discussion on this theme resulted in a number of problems, and corresponding solutions, as presented below. Similar to all three groups, this group was comprised of municipality officials, intermediaries (civil society representatives) and citizens, primarily employed by the private sector (but not only). The group identified a number of problems and corresponding solutions, finally agreeing on a desired vision for the situation at hand.

3.1.1. Existing problems and corresponding potential solutions

a. The intensification of the decentralization process (expansion of responsibilities in education, forests, secondary network of drainage and irrigation, etc.) and the implementation of the TAR has increased the demand for diversified services, information and intensive interaction from the citizens. (The population of Elbasan is 1.8 times bigger and the territory is 39 times larger since the TAR.)

Solution: Strengthening of the 13 administrative units within the municipality by delegating more functions and responsibilities to them, as well as the corresponding funds. In this way, the municipality could better share its workload, and operate one level closer to the citizens through its representative administrative units.

b. The current operational structures and communication channels of the Municipality of Elbasan are often characterized by low visibility, efficiency, and delivery regarding communication and information sharing with citizens.

Solution: The municipality should ensure all current structures and mechanisms are fully operational and functioning, in line with the purpose they were set to serve upon their establishment.

c. There is a lack of useful, elaborate, and updated information from municipal sources, be it through direct contact at the institutions, or through online media. Furthermore, there are some concerns related to the reach that the website has in each administrative unit (AU).

Solution: The website should be updated more frequently, especially on sensitive issues such as information related to public procurements, funding, and grants from international or local donors.

d. There is a lack of adequate sources of information and communication specifically aimed at vulnerable groups, where ICT is not reachable or accessible.

Solution: Creating new sources of communication and information fitted for specific vulnerabilities/circumstances: example for people without access/internet

knowledge.

e. There is a great need for training in order for the local authorities to use technology as a tool to improve governance and increase citizen participation in the decision making process.

Solution: Training the municipal staff in accordance with the specific needs of the Municipality. Provision of an internal regulatory document, where tasks for each of the personnel are described, including time schedule, deliveries, ethics, etc.

f. There is a current lack of regular engagement with vulnerable groups and a lack of tailored approaches in engaging with them, especially those in the most remote areas of the municipality.

Solution: Organize community meetings and coordinate with the representative local NGOs, CBOs. The Municipality should incentivize CBOs to expand their scope of work in the expanded territory and prioritize projects or interventions in the most remote areas.

3.1.2. *Vision: (desired situation)*

Provision of a practical handbook to assist the Municipality and other administrative units within the Municipality to start a participatory process or to better coordinate the existing mechanisms of public participation.

Given the current priorities at the municipal level, and in order to ensure ownership and commitment to a more accountable Municipality, as well as considering that the Municipality of Elbasan has a significant number of participatory processes and mechanisms, the preparation of a working document (practical handbook/roadmap/guide), designed to contribute to the ability of municipal officials and staff to strengthen and coordinate the existing or new participatory practices, was proposed. The Manual's first section will include a participatory toolkit, containing detailed descriptions of all the existing tools used to support public participation in local government. These descriptions are intended to provide the municipal staff with a clear understanding of the steps required for the planning and implementation of each of the mechanisms, from the perspective of the Municipality of Elbasan. A calendar of annual activities should be attached, together with a working plan for the personnel involved in participatory practices.

Under this scenario, the Municipality of Elbasan can apply each of the tools described in the toolkit in order to increase the transparency of decision making, improve the ability of decision makers to be accountable to the public, and to contribute to the continued democratization of local government. Participatory practices will be considered as successful when the public's level of awareness on municipal planning issues and decisions is increased. This will provide local government leaders with a greater appreciation for public priorities, and will promote greater public involvement in local government affairs.

Specific Proposal: *The preparation of a working document (practical handbook/roadmap/guide), designed to contribute to the ability of municipal officials and staff to initiate, strengthen and coordinate participatory practices.*

WHAT

Preparation of a working document (practical handbook/roadmap/guide), designed to contribute to the ability of municipal officials and staff to initiate and strengthen participatory practices. The document would be binding at local levels and ensure a high participation rate of consultation groups and a coherent reflection and alignment of the legal requirements, internal regulations, and

procedures of the Municipality.

WHY

In order for the proposed action to work, it needs to be realistic, reflect local government priorities at the given time, and have ownership. By taking a comprehensive approach, this proposal combines current local government priorities – the provision of a roadmap with an integrated participatory component, and increased engagement in the long term, through enhanced channels/methods of communication.

HOW

In partnership with civil society organizations, the Municipality will engage in drafting the document in compliance with the legal and normative requirements, reflecting the needs and priorities of all interest groups in the city. Co-PLAN will provide the final synthesis report to the Municipality of Elbasan of the SSCE/UPP II project, where the current levels of accountability and citizen engagement are extensively analyzed. The Municipality can build upon the findings and reevaluate¹⁰ resources and the feasibility of the recommendations. Similar to the approach of the social sustainability assessment, the Municipality should identify its target groups and match the most suitable channels, methods, and messages of communication, together with a responsible person from each of the municipal departments. Depending on the consultation processes and the evaluation of current resources, the Municipality can shape the roadmap in collaboration with experienced NGOs.

WHO

The Municipality of Elbasan, NGOs, IT experts, consultative groups, etc.

WHEN

By December 2016

INDICATORS

The roadmap document itself increases exposure and visibility; number of coordination meetings; number of actors involved; rate of accomplishment on a yearly basis; number of communication channels used; etc.

HOW MUCH

The cost of expertise required for preparing the roadmap; cost of technical intervention for practical adjustment, maintenance, and regular updating of the website, promotional costs, etc. Tentative estimate: 5,000 – 10,000 USD.

3.2 Theme 2: Demand – How to increase public awareness?

Similar to all three groups, this group was comprised of municipality officials, intermediaries (civil society representatives) and citizens, primarily employed by the private sector (but not only). The group identified a number of problems and corresponding solutions, finally agreeing on a desired vision for the situation at hand.

3.2.1. Existing problems and corresponding potential solutions

a. The public has poor knowledge on the rights and responsibilities of citizens and the functions of local government institutions.

Solution: To promote the importance of the recognition of the rights, responsibilities, and functions of local institutions by the Municipality and intermediaries.

b. There is a low participation rate among citizens (especially the youth and vulnerable groups) in

¹⁰ All PSD workshop scenarios will be made available to the Municipality
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participatory practices such as participatory budget meetings, public hearings, consultations, cultural activities, etc.

Solution: A calendar of annual activities for all participatory processes should be prepared and published in the Municipal Hall, website, and on social media. ICT and non-ICT mechanisms should be used to inform and invite all citizens, with a tailored approach for the most remote zones.

c. Current feedback and monitoring mechanisms are poorly maintained and promoted and have low institutional responsiveness rates to citizen requests and complaints.

Solution: Increase the visibility of the register of complaints and requests on the municipal website. Build up the section “Frequently Asked Questions- FAQs” as a list of questions and answers relating to particular subjects.

d. The Municipality and intermediaries poorly promote existing sources of information and communication.

Solution: The Municipality and intermediaries are to promote regularly and maintain existing sources of information and forms of communication, particularly through an informative campaign for the whole community.

e. There is a general loss of trust among citizens that, upon obtaining information/accomplishing communication, significant rapid action for a solution will follow.

Solution: Increased efficiency of operating existing sources and new sources of communication; using information obtained from these sources; regularly and for all practices. It is advisable to showcase successful stories or good practices on the municipal website or social media.

f. There is low visibility and a general lack of information on the civil society organizations operating in the Municipality of Elbasan, especially in the most rural areas.

Solution: Increase the quantity, variety, frequency, and the number of sources of information distributed and communicated to citizens.

3.2.2. Vision (Desired Situation) Increase transparency and citizen engagement by consolidating participatory practices, while launching an awareness raising campaign on these matters

The Municipality of Elbasan has recognized the value of transparency in the way decisions are made, which is why it has introduced and applies many participatory processes. Nonetheless, the comparison of FGDs and IDIs highlighted that the city’s social accountability efforts can work for some groups but not for others. Whether because of technological constraints, inconvenient office hours, time-consuming processes, or a lack of willingness, FGD participants reported very low levels of civic engagement (few had taken part in any participatory activity led by the Municipality). An intensive three-week campaign can offer opportunities for the Municipality to present all the existing (and new) participatory initiatives and mechanisms to citizens, which will make them more aware about possible ways to engage with the Municipality. Also, because the one-stop-shop offices are a direct contact point between the citizens and the Municipality, more should be invested in increasing the number and efficiency of one-stop-shop offices, based on the particular needs and specifics of the community, including all vulnerable groups.

Specific Proposal: Further consolidate participatory practices, while launching an all-inclusive

awareness raising campaign on communication channels used by the Municipality

WHAT	Consolidate participatory processes by engaging consultative groups, organizing thematic meetings, and involving representatives from all interest groups, particularly vulnerable groups. The Municipality should aim to strengthen the capacity of every actor, so they can act as a catalyst for overall development. The Municipality should make monitoring an inseparable part of the work practice, particularly concerning service provision and communication with the citizens/intermediaries through highly competent staff and well trained officials to handle practical/daily issues, with a good understanding of the basic services that the Municipality offers. An awareness raising campaign will serve to inform all citizens of the current and new interaction mechanisms and participatory processes.
WHY	In order to increase social accountability and ensure that the way decisions are made and funds allocated is transparent to all interest groups, it is important that such groups are made part of the process themselves. Given that the Municipality already has many participatory processes, it is important to engage more people in them. A double action, such as the consolidation of the existing mechanisms (through capacity building, strengthening of monitoring and feedback mechanisms) and the introduction of these tools to all interested groups (through an informative campaign) is necessary when tackling all the challenges in the area of accountability and participation.
HOW	The Municipality will ensure that the formulation of participatory practices is an inclusive, highly representative process. It will go deeper into the relations between local–decentralized–institutions, civil society, and the private sector to define together the local collective interest. Capacity building of every actor to act as a catalyst and operator of territorial development is crucial. There is an immediate need to build up the capacities of local authorities and civil society both in terms of participatory tools and the definition and implementation of participatory public policies. In this way, the Municipality ensures increased participation and transparency, hence improved social accountability.
WHO	Municipality, local government institutions, consultation groups, NGOs.
WHEN	6 months – 1 year
INDICATORS	Participation rates in all processes; performance assessment by intermediaries (CSOs, consultants, etc.); number of responses on the service satisfactory surveys; etc.
HOW MUCH	The cost is difficult to calculate given that it is an all-inclusive intervention and includes the capacity building component. As this is an institutional process, the Municipality could cover this through its own funds or include local organizations, specifically for the awareness raising campaigns. Estimated cost: 25,000 USD.

3.3 Theme 3: Interaction mechanisms – ICT & Traditional solutions to enable communication

Similar to all three groups, this group was comprised of municipality officials, intermediaries (civil society representatives) and citizens, primarily employed by the private sector (but not only). The group identified a number of problems and corresponding solutions, finally agreeing on a desired vision for the situation at hand.

3.3.1. Existing problems and corresponding potential solutions

a. The existing information points/one-stop-offices in each of the administrative units within the Municipality of Elbasan are not fully equipped with the necessary logistics and ICT.

Solution: Expand the information network service and appliances from the City of Elbasan to the administrative units, by making more information available to the administrative unit offices and increasing the municipality's visibility in the new expanded territory.

b. There is a lack of activity coordination between the central hall and the official representatives in each of the administrative units.

Solution: Increase coordination between intermediaries and local government authorities' representatives, such as in the case of the head of the administrative units. Coordination meetings should happen at a certain frequency not only within specific departments, but also between the administrative units.

d. IT infrastructure is limited merely to the City of Elbasan.

Solution: Set up free internet at the one-stop-shop offices in each of the administrative units of the Municipality, serving to provide information and collect requests, complaints, and civil emergencies in terms of service provision.

e. Official responses to citizen complaints are not always timely.

Solution: The Municipality enforces the standard times for issuing responses to citizens' complaints.

f. Standards and practices are inefficient to measure citizen satisfaction/opinion.

Solution: Regularly produce and publish surveys reflecting current issues high on the socio-economic and political agenda, which influence decision-making.

g. There is a limited range of digitalized services available in the Municipality of Elbasan.

Solution: Invest in digitalizing certain services, such as the provision of certificates, various procedure applications, submission of official requests, etc.

i. The weekly newspaper of the Municipality "Almanaku" is distributed only to the City of Elbasan and is not distributed to the other administrative units.

Solution: The Municipality should improve the newspaper distribution strategy and enrich the content of the newspaper with more information, especially related to the whole territory.

3.3.2. Vision (Desired Situation)

Provision of technical assistance in capacity development and strengthening of human resource skills (ICT and non-ICT related)

The efficiency and training of human resources remains a challenge in the Municipality, especially

in circumstances where the staff (especially technicians) will have to carry out processes of a diversified nature and on a broader scale. With a larger territory to administer, staff must be trained to coordinate actions for 13 constituent units of the Municipality. Technical assistance and capacity building has so far been considered missing due to the frequent changes happening during political rotation after each electoral cycle. The functions and responsibilities (existing and new) that are transferred to municipalities (in compliance with the decentralization strategy and the new organic laws) raise the need for building institutional capacities.

Specific Proposal: *Training of civil servants in public service delivery and one-stop-shops for the local government of Elbasan*

- WHAT** This scenario aims to build capacity and more specifically increase the knowledge and skills of individuals, strengthening the municipal structures and systems that are needed to effectively deliver services and information. It also aims to standardize all of the services provided by the Municipality.
- WHY** In order to increase interaction with the community and facilitate certain services, it is important that the Municipality reevaluates all the existing communication channels (ICT and non ICT-related) and improves wherever it assesses that human capacities and skills are limited. This intervention is particularly relevant, given that the territory has expanded and the nature of service delivery has diversified. The new competences and responsibilities (that are transferred to municipalities in compliance with the decentralization strategy) raise the need for building institutional capacities with a focus on: management of particular services, public finances, statistics, strategic planning, writing and project management, territorial governance, etc.
- HOW** For a robust plan based on realistic assumptions and expectations, the Municipality should know what capacity is available (across all administrative units and departments involved in service delivery and sustainability) and what additional capacity is required. The timescales, funding, and activities required to establish and maintain capacity need to be built into the plan.
- WHO** Consultant and experts, etc.
- WHEN** By December 2016
- INDICATORS** Training certificates for the staff; the response by citizens to the municipal offices and one-stop-shops sites (based on online user surveys and complaint received); etc.
- HOW MUCH** The cost of training the entire staff, which is directly involved with citizens (around 70 employees in total) during a one or two day session. Tentative estimate: 17,000 USD.

4 Key Considerations for Next Steps

While the problems addressed by the groups during the workshops were easily identified (in most cases followed by practical solutions), it was noted that there was a common tendency towards capacity building and consolidation of the existing participatory practices, especially related to the one-stop-shop offices. The representatives of the municipality and representatives from CBOs expressed their full willingness to collaborate in feasible, clear, and real proposals. There were attempts to determine joint ownership of each of the suggested scenarios, however the Municipality of Elbasan was often seen as the main problem-solver. Some of the most prevalent and emerging issues identified during the scenario development were the following:

1. Scenarios have to be part of an integrated action plan and closely related to the consolidation of the one-stop-shop offices. While the Municipality is responsible for implementing a number of the suggested interventions, the intermediaries and the community alike need to play an active part and take ownership of the interventions/actions directly connected to the community and vulnerable groups. During the workshop, we tried to engage all three groups and highlight the fact that such changes are not one institution's or one individual's responsibility.
2. There is a clear need for an internal document (binding and operational) at the municipal level in order to plan and ensure the further consolidation of all participatory practices and communication channels. An important component is the monitoring mechanisms, as most ideas/investments lack sustainability upon implementation due to poor maintenance or lack of functionality, visibility, or utility. In addition, the document should reflect approaches particularly tailored to various vulnerable groups and various age-groups in the city, and the best way to reach out to them.
3. A significant number of scenarios that were developed were more in the form of actions seeking to trigger other actions, fulfilling in this way the catalyzing approach that the SSCE project has had from the beginning. For instance, some practices are already part of the municipal agenda and in full operation mode; what the scenarios highlighted was the need to make them more effective and part of the Municipality's daily practices.

The PSD workshop and the scenarios developed by the participants representing civil society and the public sector in Elbasan addressed many of the issues raised during the first two phases of the social assessment. The participatory development workshop offered a number of specific scenarios and actions, where more interactions and consolidated participatory practices were identified as the main influences for addressing gaps in accountability, service provision, and engagement, as identified in early phases of the process. Elbasan as a Municipality has an excellent opportunity to use these findings while reevaluating its needs and priorities in terms of social sustainability and citizen engagement practices. The recommendation provided, is expected to be anchored in municipal policies and practices. It is suggested that stakeholders pursuing these initiatives should meet quarterly to report on their efforts and consult in a continuing and inclusive process.

The Municipality of Elbasan has already drafted the action plan in order to strengthen the existing participatory practices and anchor them in municipal practices. A roadmap/manual on Local Government Participatory Practices has been designed to contribute to the ability of municipal officials and staff to initiate or strengthen participatory practices in their communities. This manual is timely and responds well to two of the foremost challenges that the Municipality faces after the Territorial and Administrative Reform, linked to both decentralization and democratization of the local government. The Manual includes all the existing participatory practices in the Municipality

of Elbasan. Some of the practices are most appropriate where the municipality is interested only in disseminating information to the public. Other practices allow the municipality to place greater emphasis on inviting public input and opinion. Finally, the Manual offers the municipality a guidance in how to plan and implement each of the practices in the most effective way not only to be in full compliance with the legislation, but also to absorb some of the best practices worldwide.

During the Socially Inclusive Cities regional conference held in Zagreb at the end of March 2017, city representatives from Elbasan used actual examples of existing mechanisms and activities in the action plan to highlight their responsibility to provide transparent information to reinforce the participation of citizens and open space for them to react to different projects and budgeting processes. City stakeholders also discussed how to organize monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plan, suggesting making decisions about the bodies or structures that will be in charge of different action plan indicators. A body rooted within the municipal council (charged with adopting the plan) was suggested as the institution that could raise awareness among citizens about the initiatives of the action plan and their implementation progress. The group also brainstormed how to improve citizen and business partner demand for accountability to stimulate the monitoring and evaluation process.

ANNEX 1: SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT INDEX

Concept Note

The objective of the SSCE Index is to assist municipalities, civic groups and NGOs to develop a set of indicators that gauge progress towards increasing social accountability and citizen engagement, particularly among marginalized communities or vulnerable groups.

The Index originally emerged from the Social Sustainability Audit of UPP I (2012-2013), which functioned as a tool used by City Teams to assess the supply and demand of information and participation in a given municipality and the state of feedback/monitoring mechanisms based on the three data gathering phases – Municipal Profile, FGDs and IDIs, and Participatory Scenario Development Workshops. This index has been revised in content and application to demonstrate greater conceptual linkages with the other three UPP II initiatives and alignment with the World Bank’s Citizen Engagement Framework.

The consortium built upon the Index developed during UPP I and tried to preserve as much of its content as was relevant to the new conceptual organization of the new Index. While the Social Sustainability Index assessed the supply and demand side factors of Transparency and Participation and the feedback mechanisms that create a continuous process, the SSCE Index assesses the supply and demand sides of willingness and capacity for citizen engagement, as well as the feedback mechanisms that create a continuous process and the use of ICT to broaden the reach of CE initiatives and streamline CE processes.

Conceptual Framework of the SSCE Index

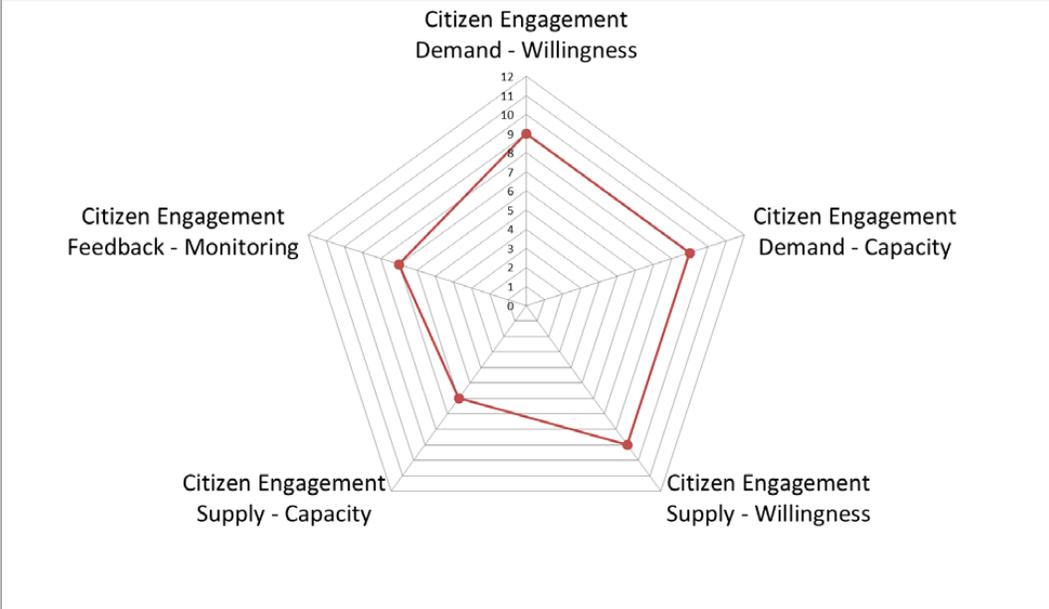


The SSCE Index is structured as a series of six questions for each of the five pillars of citizen engagement being investigated throughout this project cycle based on the three concepts of Willingness (demand and supply); Capacity (demand and supply); and the Feedback/Monitoring that serves as the connective tissue. In addition, the same six questions can be read in a way that gives an additional reading of the thematic strengths and weaknesses of social accountability and citizen engagement initiatives in each municipality (a “pulse” on perceptions of citizen engagement in areas related to other components of the UPP).

During the project, Co-PLAN administered over 50 SSCE Index questionnaires that were filled in by FGD and IDI participants and PSD participants. Disaggregated information is not disclosed due to the fact that this questionnaire was anonymous. Co-PLAN received some general comments when it comes to questions and the response options. Firstly, participants stated that the responses

offered are not adequate, due to fact that they do not have information about each of the categories. Some suggested that there should be an additional response option of “do not know”. Furthermore, they thought that some questions could have been structured differently and could be more focused on certain topics. The results of this process are presented below.

Index Results for Elbasan



In Elbasan, both demand side components received equal and relatively high scores. On the supply side however, the willingness of the municipality was rated significantly higher than the capacity. Consistent with findings across cities, feedback and monitoring received a low score, though municipal citizen engagement supply capacity still ranked the lowest across pillars. Usually, all individuals from both the focus groups and in-depth interviews and PSD workshop had the same understanding regarding the questions of the index. However, in many cases, participants in the PSD workshop had a better understanding of the existing participatory mechanisms of the municipality of Elbasan, making the Supply side-capacity scoring better than in the case of participants of FGDs and IDIs.

Demand – Willingness. Questions regarding city council meetings and citizen participation from a demand side received tepid responses, as citizens “somewhat” express interest in actively attending the meetings and are given “somewhat” sufficient notice about upcoming meetings.

Supply – Willingness. Municipal will and leadership in providing citizen engagement opportunities is marked by the presentation of budget information to the community, the existence of an info desk, and accountability to other institutions in terms of implementing various citizen engagement mechanisms.

Demand – Capacity. The capacity of citizens to demand engagement opportunities and actively participate in municipal affairs is strengthened by the existence of active NGOs and neighborhood councils in Elbasan.

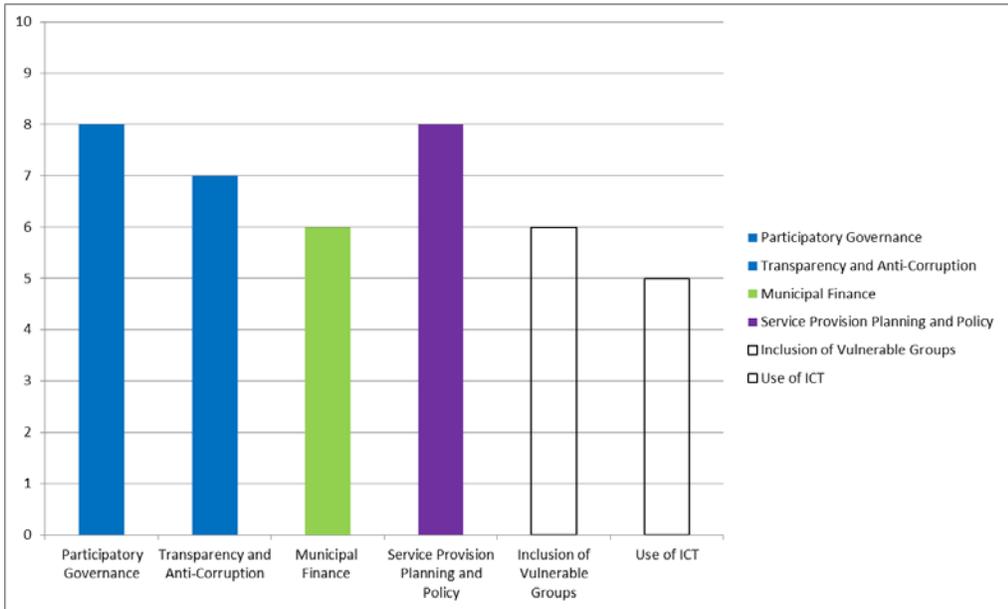
Supply – Capacity. When it comes to the Supply side-capacity, both the average and the individual scores by groups, show that this is the weakest point in the engagement environment of the municipality. Vulnerable groups are somewhat consulted in the preparation of strategic documents and have some organizations that work for them and represent. The city lacks, however, financial resources for investment in citizen engagement or a participatory budgeting

process.

Feedback and Monitoring scores low compared to other components. One explanation of this could be that grievance and complaint systems are perceived to be one-dimensional and don't take advantage of multiple channels and types of ICT.

In order to see how social accountability and citizen engagement initiatives at the municipal level relate with themes such as anti-corruption, municipal finance, and urban planning and in order to find synergies between the SSCE program and other components of UPP II, responses of the participants in FGDs, IDIs and PSD workshop were analyzed by topic. These "pulse" scores for Elbasan are calculated below.

Citizen Engagement Pulse Scores for Elbasan



The Municipality of Elbasan performs relatively well in terms of Participatory Governance and Service Provision Planning and Policy, but it scores low in the use of ICT. This can be explained by the fact that ICT is mostly used to disseminate information rather than providing services. However, the Municipality is in the process of strengthening the usage of One-Stop-Shop offices, which are expected to boost the usage of ICT in service delivery. Regarding Municipal Finances, the Municipality has yet to adopt good practices in order to make the process more opened for the citizens. Participatory budgeting is a good practice the Municipality applies from many years now. It should strengthen its efficacy by publishing all the reports from the participatory meetings and the way they have been considered for budget preparation. (Note: Detailed scores by pillars / questions are available on request)

ANNEX 2: INDEX QUESTIONS AND SCORING FRAMEWORK

	Participatory Governance (0,1,2)	Transparency & Anti-Corruption (0,1,2)	Municipal Finance (0,1,2)	Service Provision, Planning & Policy (0,1,2)	Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups (0,1,2)	Use of ICT (0,1,2)	
CE Demand – Willingness	1. Do citizens attend and actively participate in city council meetings? 1	2. Is there an anonymous way to report municipal fraud or corruption? 2	3. Is there demand for participatory budgeting processes from citizens or CSOs? 2	4. Do platforms exist through which civil society discusses municipal service / planning / policy? 2	5. Are minority or vulnerable communities represented in the current city council? 1	6. Do citizens and CSOs engage with the municipality online? 1	Total CE Demand Willingness Score 9 (out of 12)
CE Demand – Capacity	1. Are there elected neighborhood councils or equivalent structures? 2	2. Are citizens given sufficient notice about upcoming city council meetings or public forums? 2	3. Are citizens aware of how the city’s budget is spent? 1	4. Do citizens know where to go to report a municipal issue or grievance? 1	5. Do NGOs exist that actively engage in representing the interests of vulnerable groups? 2	6. Are citizens able to reliably access municipal information online? 1	Total CE Demand Capacity Score 9 (out of 12)
CE Supply – Willingness	1. Is the municipality accountable to other institutions in terms of implementing mechanisms of citizen engagement? 2	2. Is there a document (charter) outlining the responsibilities of both government and citizens that is publicly accessible? 1	3. Does the city administration present municipal budgets to neighborhoods as part of the formal fiscal preparation cycle? 2	4. Is there an active information desk available to citizens? 2	5. Are vulnerable groups consulted in preparing strategic policy documents, budgets, etc.? 1	6. Does the municipality have an open data policy? 1	Total CE Supply Willingness Score 9 (out of 10)
CE Supply – Capacity	1. Does the city hold meetings/ consultations with the public to gain information on issues that are important to citizens? 2	2. Is citizen-accessible information updated regularly through various platforms? 1	3. Does the municipality have financial resources for investment in citizen engagement or a participatory budget? 0	4. Is there an annual citizen service satisfaction survey? 1	5. Does the city have a program to engage with vulnerable groups or CSOs that represent them? 1	6. Are there municipal staff with ICT training or the opportunity for such training? 1	Total CE Supply Capacity Score 6 (out of 12)
CE Feedback / Monitoring	1. Are neighborhood councils (or similar structures) effectively linking the citizens to the city (or municipality)? 1	2. Are citizen grievances responded to or addressed in a timely and transparent manner by the relevant departments / service providers? 1	3. Are citizen or civil society inputs incorporated into municipal budgets? 1	4. Are time limits for responses to citizen grievances / reports abided by? 2	5. Has the municipality addressed key issues of concern to vulnerable groups based on their inputs? 1	6. Do grievance/ complaint systems use multiple types of technology? 1	Total CE Feedback Loop Score 7 (out of 12)
	Total Participatory Governance Score 8 (out of 10)	Total Transparency & Anti-Corruption Score 7 (out of 10)	Total Municipal Finance Score 6 (out of 10)	Total Service Provision, Planning, and Policy 8 (out of 10)	Total Inclusion Score 6 (out of 10)	Total ICT Score 5 (out of 10)	SSCE SCORE 40 (out of 60)
	↑ Cities without Corruption	↑ Cities without Corruption (CE Pulse)	↑ MFSA (CE Pulse)	↑ UPSA (CE Pulse)			