



Local Consultative Mechanism for IPA2
EuropeAid/138660/ID/ACT/MK



Analytical report:

Local level capacities

to absorb and

programme IPA Funds

Case study:

City of STRUMICA

The Project is financed by
the European Union



Project:

Local Consultative Mechanism for IPA2

National Transition Assistance and Institution Building Programme (TAIB) 2013 - IPA,
EuropeAid/138660/ID/ACT/MK

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NGO Info-centre, Skopje

Organization of Women of Strumica.

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Local level capacities to absorb and programme IPA Funds

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City of Strumica

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List of Abbreviations

European Union	EU
Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance	IPA
Civil Society Organisations	CSO
Units of local self-government	ULS
Sector of economic development, public activities and information technologies	SED
Cross-border cooperation programme	CBC

Project Description

Programme:	National Transition Assistance and Institution Building Programme (TAIB) 2013 - IPA		
Project Name:	Local Consultative Mechanism for IPA2		
Reference No.:	EuropeAid/138660/ID/ACT/MK		
Contract No.:	12-7455/1		
Length:	18 months		
Start date:	December 19, 2017		
End date:	June 18, 2019		
Name:	Foundation NGO Infocentre Skopje	Ministry of Finance - CFCD	Government of the Republic of Macedonia – General Secretariat
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Goal:	To improve the involvement of local actors in decision-making mechanisms related to the EU accession process.		
Objective:	Increased involvement of municipalities and local civil society organisations from four statistical regions in programming, monitoring and implementation of IPA2 funds.		
Expected results:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analytical reports from the mapping of existing situation and cooperation between municipal administrations and civil society organisations in programming and participation in IPA funding (in municipalities of Bitola, Strumica, Tetovo and the City of Skopje) 2. Study of existing situation, needs and policies of civil society organisations for access to and use of IPA funds. 3. Improved knowledge and increased capacities of municipalities and civil society organisations to participate in the programming of IPA funding and apply for European financing. 4. Improved networking of civil society organisations to follow joint advocacy strategies that reflect the local interests and needs. 5. Preparation of action plans in municipalities to provide for permanent mechanisms for consultations among municipalities, improved contributions and participation of municipalities in programming of funding and platform for joint applications for European funds. 		
Activities:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identification of local challenges and needs, through consultations, research and analyses. 2. Transfer of knowledge through training for municipal administrations and civil society organisations. 3. Development of municipal action plans and establishment of local consultation mechanisms. 		
Key stakeholders	Local civil society organisations, municipalities: Bitola, Tetovo, Strumica and the City of Skopje		
Target groups	Civil society organisations, local administration		

Introduction

This analytical report is a part of a series of case-studies that aim to map the existing capacities to use and programme IPA funds on the local level, in the municipalities of Bitola, Tetovo, Strumica and the City of Skopje. In order to facilitate increased involvement of local actors in decision-making mechanisms related to the EU accession process, in these analyses we make assessment and offer recommendations for increased involvement of municipalities and local civil society organisations from Skopje, Polog, Pelagonija and Southeast Planning Region in programming, monitoring and implementation of IPA2 funds. This analytical report covers the Municipality of Strumica.

The drafting of this document, following a methodology applied to all analytical reports, included a series of preparatory activities and initial contacts which were used, in the process of research and analysis, as basis for more detailed collection of data on the situation in Tetovo Municipality regarding the use of EU funding, and the cooperation of the local administration with civil society organisations. The four analytical reports, including this one covering the Municipality of Strumica, provide an overview of each of the target local communities and were based on a unified methodology for collection and analysis of data. The individual case-studies provide specific recommendations tailored for each individual municipality, which will then be used to draw parallels between different local contexts.

In addition, while mapping the existing situation in terms of capacities of municipalities to apply for and influence the programming of IPA funds, the research team conducted an assessment of needs and capacities of local CSOs. Some of the findings on the CSOs based in Strumica Municipality were included in this analysis, but they will be processed in more detail and subjected to comparative analysis in a separate policy document, together with the findings from the three other municipalities covered by this project.

The four analyses present the current situation in the selected municipalities regarding their capacity to apply for EU funding and, at the same time, to absorb and distribute the funds to serve municipal and regional interests and priorities. The measures and activities that may be implemented with the help of IPA funding imply the existence of adequate planning activities, therefore, this analysis assesses the constant participation and influence of the noted actors in the processes of programming of European funds, in accordance with the key strategic documents on a structured and smart local and regional development (both those that are in effect and those that will be developed in the future).

Methodology and Subject of Analysis

The subject of this analytical report is an analysis of the model and effectiveness of participation of the Municipality of Strumica in EU's IPA programmes, from the current (2014-2020) and the previous financial perspective of EU, and the success of the cooperation between the municipal administration and local CSOs in participation and programming of IPA funds. Information and data from many primary and secondary sources was analysed in order to be able to assess and evaluate the capacities of the two stakeholders.

The preparation of this analysis relied on the combined methodological approach of research and analysis: questionnaires/online surveys for CSO representatives, semi-structured in-depth interviews with the key actors from the municipal administration and the CSOs, analysis of relevant strategic and reference documents.

The analysis of documents¹, including primary and secondary sources of information, initially focused on the key strategic documents that offer information on performance of municipal administration and local CSOs, regarding their participation in programming and implementation of EU/IPA programmes.

¹ Relevant referent documents:

- Existing strategic frameworks and documents, planning documents with corresponding action plans, and other referent national strategic documents, including the documents for programming of IPA.
- Available publications and research with documenting experiences and involvement of CSOs in the Programming Period 2007-2013, as well as available information on the ongoing programming period, together with published expectations and projections (available from the programming stages and processes of Programming Period 2014-2020).
- Data and information on supported projects under IPA1, as well as signed agreements for implementation of projects under IPA2 (that is, the participation of CSOs in preparation and programming of EU programmes).

Through **semi-structured in-depth interviews** with representatives of municipal administration and local CSOs and an additional online survey intended for CSOs (implemented in March and April 2018), we mapped and identified the context of local development interests and self-assessment of existing capacities on the local level. In the preparatory stage, before interviews were conducted, we developed interviewing guidelines with clear instructions and areas of interest, including interviewing questionnaires (annexed to this document).

We interviewed the head and the clerks of the Department of International Cooperation and European Funds of the Municipality of Strumica, as well as representatives of the civil sector. In accordance with the unified methodology, in each of the selected municipalities, interviews were conducted with the officials charged with the issues of local economic development (LED advisors/specialists), personnel responsible for cooperation with CSOs and those responsible for international/regional cooperation.

The online questionnaires were developed and shared with active CSOs from the City of Skopje (members of the IPA Mechanism for CSOs²). At the same time, interviews were conducted with representatives of CSOs based in the Municipality of Strumica as key local stakeholders, with the aim to confirm the identified challenges and experiences of CSOs in the implementation of IPA programmes and their programming. In addition, a focus group was organized with representatives of active civil society organisations working in the Municipality of Strumica. Those activities allowed us to map the existing situation, especially the deficiencies and challenges that demand additional support and intervention.

² IPA2 Mechanism for CSOs <http://www.ipa2cso.mk/>

Analysis of Situation – Capacities to Use and Programme EU Funds

For precise analysis of performance, cooperation models and existing capacities to absorb EU funding, we analysed the findings from the field visits and interviews with key representatives of the municipal administration and civil society organisations, as well as the data from referent documents.

The analysis of documents included a desk-analysis of existing strategic framework and programmes, planning documents and corresponding action plans, as well as other referent national strategic documents, including the IPA programming documentation (with special attention to the CBC programmes, where municipal administration in Strumica has greatest experience of implementation). At the same time, for the purpose of assessment of performance and cooperation models, we took into consideration the annual programmes and reports on the work of Strumica Municipality (for the period covering the previous and the current financial perspective of EU, that is, the periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020³).

The key strategic documents used to assess and evaluate the existing development framework and programmes, cooperation models and capacities for development programming were: The Strategy for Local Economic Development of the Municipality of Strumica 2016-2020 (drafted and adopted in 2016) and the Municipality of Strumica Strategy for Cooperation with the Civil Sector 2015-2020 (drafted and adopted in 2015).

The available publications and research reports on experiences of CSO involvement provided additional perspective for the cross-cutting analysis of models of cooperation and involvement of all stakeholders. While somewhat limited, some surveys of the civil sector provide an overview of experiences for the programming period 2007-2013, as well as information on expectations for the programming period 2014-2020 (available from IPA2 programming processes and stages).

The capacities for preparation and implementation of development projects through the available foreign assistance are related to the data on projects already financed by EU and other international donors implemented by the municipal administration (both as lead-applicant and as partner). Specifically, we noted the projects already supported under the IPA1, as well as signed agreements for implementation of projects under IPA2. For general assessment of the preparation of projects for support of local development, we asked for data on all project proposals submitted for donor assistance (to EU or other international donors) which weren't approved for funding and support.

We used the interviews to validate the findings on the success of implementation of strategic documents (including the effects and achieved results of the valid strategies, currently in effect, on local economic development, cooperation with the civil sector, youth policies, education, welfare) and capacities for absorption of additional funding through programmes ran by EU. At the same time, regarding the models and practices of cooperation between the Municipality and the CSOs, we developed key recommendations for improved joint actions and increased direct participation in the IPA programmes.

³ Working programmes and reports published by the Municipality of Strumica, starting with the year of submission/implementation of the first project-proposal under IPA Programming period 2007-2013. Before 2010, the funds programmed in previous EU programmes were still available and they were not taken into consideration by this Analysis.

Municipality of Strumica and EU Programmes

As a country candidate for EU membership, the Republic of Macedonia, or more specifically, the Municipality of Strumica and the Southeast Planning Region have access to programmes for support to cross-border cooperation programmes under IPA⁴, in the programming period 2007-2013, and under IPA⁵, in the programming period 2014-2020. The main postulate of the CCP component of the IPA uses as the starting point the capacities and efficiency of programming and implementation of cross-border programmes. The regions in focus of CBC programmes, through implementation of projects that address key local problems in accordance with the programming focus of CBC, have an opportunity for real improvement and promotion of balanced cross-border development with activities designed with sustainability in mind⁶. The Municipality of Strumica and the Southeast Planning Region take part in CBC programmes implemented with Greece and Bulgaria.

The Macedonia – Greece CBC under IPA¹ focused on economic development, tourism and transport infrastructure and improved environmental protection and “people to people” activities. IPA², on the other hand, offers a more focused thematic approach for development of local economy, employment, labour mobility, social and cultural development, development of tourism, promotion of cul-

tural and natural heritage, environmental protection and promotion of alleviation, reduction, prevention and management of climate change risks, as well as promotion of sustainable transportation. Within the three calls announced under CBC Macedonia – Greece, a total of 49 projects were financed to a total value of EUR 9,538,046, just one of them carried by a CSO in the lead.

The IPA¹ Macedonia – Bulgaria CBC focused its programming goals (from the aspect of subjects they covered) on sustainable economic and social development/cohesion in the cross-border region. Under IPA², the focus moved to sustainable tourism, competition and environmental protection. Within the three calls, a total of 100 projects were financed to a total value of EUR 9,867,549, just 13 of them CSO implemented. The three calls show a positive, growing trend for CSO participation – from seven organisations in the first, to 23 organisations participating in the third call.

On national level, the Municipality of Strumica is a positive example of participation in EU’s IPA programmes. However, a cross-check of information gathered through interviews, questionnaires and the available data on concluded and completed agreements to implement projects under IPA, indicates that the level of absorption and utilisation of available funds could and should be greater. The existing strategic framework of the Municipality is consolidated with the programming focus of available funding, programmed by EU under the IPA programmes.

We should note the Municipality of Strumica’s practice to promote the importance and use of direct involvement of public enterprises and other local actors in the absorption of EU funds as a start of a successful model of cooperation.

The Municipality of Strumica has past experience of implementation of IPA projects in the programming period 2007-2013. The majority of those projects were within the CBC framework, which was only logical and to be expected having in mind availability of funds and set strategic goals and priorities. The referent document for implemented projects is the list of projects supported by external donors, available on the official website of the municipality. Under the IPA² (Financial perspective 2014-2020), more specifically the cross-border cooperation programme with the Republic of Greece, the Municipality of Strumica continues with the positive trend of participation with one project-proposal approved for funding.

4 Regulation (EC) No. 1085/2006

5 Regulation (EC) No. 231/2014

6 Numerous analyses of participation and success of municipalities and CSOs in implementation of IPA¹ projects reaffirm the challenges faced by municipalities and CSOs as users and active participants of cross-border cooperation. Under the auspices of cross-border cooperation programmes (2007-2013), the Republic of Macedonia established cooperation with Bulgaria, Greece, Albania and Kosovo. The Republic of Macedonia also participates in the Transnational Territorial Programme of Cross-border Cooperation in Southeast Europe. In addition, during the Programming period 2014-2020, Macedonia participates in the Balkan MED programme and the cross-border cooperation programme with Serbia is expected to be opened.

Under the IPA¹, the Programming Period 2007-2013, the Municipality of Strumica implemented three projects:

- **SP Future Project: “Efficient usage of solar energy for better future”, CBC with Bulgaria 2007-2013, with total budget of EUR 432,392.40 (Strumica Municipality Budget: EUR 189,974.00).**
- **Developing Alternative Tourism Aspects - Tourism Data Project, CBC with Greece 2007 – 2013, total budget of EUR 340,060 (Strumica Municipality budget of EUR 134,160).**
- **“Protection and Promotion of Natural and Cultural Heritage in the Cross Border Region of the Municipality of Strumica and Municipality of Kilkis - HERITAGE”, CBC – Greece 2007-2013, with a total project budget of EUR 944,659.50 (Strumica Municipality Budget: EUR 324,659.50).**

Under the IPA², programming period 2014-2020, the Municipality of Strumica will implement the “Promotion of Tourism and Culture” (ToCulter), under the first call for proposals of the CBC – Greece programme.

Strategic Framework for Local Development: Interventions and Impact

The key strategic document of the Municipality of Strumica is the Strategy for Local Development 2016-2020. The document provides the development framework and identifies five priority areas it considers the key areas of intervention, with greatest potential for development and improvement of the situation on the local level. The Strategy identifies the following strategic goals⁷:

- Sustainable economic development and secured competitive investment opportunities with accelerated realization;
- Advanced agriculture and improved quality of life in rural areas;
- Protected and healthy environment with energy efficient public and private buildings;
- Improved infrastructure and urban planning in line with annual programmes and needs of the citizens; and
- Highly trained quality work-force capable of responding to the needs of economic capacities.

The Strategy notes EU funds as significant opportunities to serve the defined goals related to the economic development of Strumica Municipality. The potentials for development of tourism, the models for development and support to local business sector, and the cooperation of municipal administration and businesses with other municipalities offer significant opportunities for improvement of economic situation.

The analysis of the Strategy indicates the existence of a well-defined plan for smart and inclusive growth and development of the Municipality, which partially considers the potentials for utilisation of EU funds to serve local development. The set strategic goals are in line with the goals of EU’s IPA programme, which are prerequisite for absorption. What remains a cause of concern is the absence of specific measures and activities to increase the utilisation and absorption of external funds to serve the needs of local development.

In priority area **sustainable economic development and secured competitive investment opportunities with accelerated realisation**, one of the key goals focuses on **“building capacities of representatives of business entities to use funding to invest in development projects”**, through direct intervention to build capacities of the business sector to take part in utilisation of EU funds. The same approach is noted for priority area **advanced agriculture and improved quality of life in rural areas**, which prescribes increased capacities of individual farmers, through intervention and support for **“improved utilisation of pre-accession funds of the IPARD programme”**.

The capacity to prepare and implement development projects was analysed from the viewpoint of

⁷ Стратегија за локален економски развој на Општина Струмица (2016-2020)

already implemented projects, financially supported by the EU and other international donors. It took into account the projects that the municipality implements, as either lead or partner, under the IPA₁ and IPA₂ framework. For overall evaluation of preparation of projects to support local development, we sought information on all submitted project proposals that were not approved for support.

The analysis shows that the Municipality of Strumica occasionally applies the practice of ad hoc decisions in determining the priority of certain project proposals, without paying attention if they are in line (or not) with the local strategic goals and existing development framework. In addition, the findings indicate certain shortcomings of internal procedures for preparation monitoring and record-keeping of submitted project-proposals. Although there are no official records, the Municipality does have insight into the submitted applications and their status (within the electronic data-bases and platforms for submission of project-proposals). Such ad hoc solutions, however, are not sufficient. It needs to establish procedures for continuous monitoring and records of official statistics of success of proposed and supported projects, presented per programme and per call (specifically for donors' funds), and compared with the strategic priorities of the Municipality.

The organisation set-up and the available resources of the municipal administration are the key requirement for increased absorption and utilisation of IPA funds. The leader of development perspectives of Strumica Municipality is its SLED, which administers the local economic policies and plans the development priorities of the Municipality. The lead within SLED, on the other hand, in terms of absorption of donor funds, is the Department of International Cooperation and European Funds (DICEF). In spite of its limited staff, the Department does have the expertise and experience which need, of course, to be further improved and increased. According to SLED and the DICEF, the employees need to upgrade their knowledge about EU programmes, preparation of project-proposals (in the past, the Municipality mostly hired external consultants), project management, financial management of EU projects, procurements in accordance with PRAG⁸, etc.

Past limited participation of Strumica Municipality in IPA programmes (either as lead or as partner) was due mainly to the lack of political will, even obstruction by the former central Government, to allow the Municipality to take direct participation

in CBC programmes. We should note the fact that, at this time, Strumica Municipality doesn't face and political difficulties or obstacles for the realisation of strategic goals related to accelerated local development. According to the DICEF, one of the most important development priorities for the Municipality is the access to funds and support for infrastructural projects.

The Municipality of Strumica and its Cooperation with Other Actors

Although the Municipality of Strumica has established initial cooperation with the majority of diplomatic representatives' offices in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as with other international organisations present in the country, there is a need to improve its networking activities. At the same time, the long experience of cooperation with its sister-cities may be further used to create partnerships and for exchange of good practices under some EU programmes.

The strengthening of DICEF as professional project department of the municipal administration could significantly improve the cooperation and absorption of donor funds intended for strategic local development.

As far as the potential for future development partnerships is concerned, the Municipality starts with the assumption that CSOs may be the most useful partners in preparation and implementation of projects in the framework of EU programmes. Past practices indicate that it is civil society organi-

⁸ PRAG - Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions

Civil Sector in the Municipality of Strumica: Prospects and Challenges

The Municipality of Strumica doesn't have a special department or office for cooperation with CSOs in its organisational structure. In practice, the cooperation of the Municipality with the civil society organisations is conducted by the Department of Citizen Services and Local Self-Government, the Sector of Legal, Administrative and General Affairs, or by SLED and its Department of Local Economic Development.

The Municipality adopts annual programmes for support of the civil sector and has long tradition of cooperation with CSOs in the processes of creation of municipal development policies. On national level, the Municipality of Strumica was a leader of a sort in terms of success of the model of structural dialogue and effective cooperation with CSOs on local level. One cause of concern is the trend of deterioration of those practices, that is, the exclusion of CSOs from processes of creation of strategic documents and local policies.

The financial support for CSOs is programmed under the auspices of Programme G1 (local economic development) and Programme V2 (welfare). The G1 programme supports CSOs that work in the area of local economic development, culture, education, healthcare, environmental protection and advancement, youth and youth policies. V2 programme supports activities in the area of welfare (and providers of services on the local level). The Municipality of Strumica dedicates 2.5% of its Budget as support for CSOs, one of the largest shares in the nation. In 2018, the G1 Programme provided support to SCO projects to the total value of MKD 2,990,310, while MKD 248,625 were allocated to projects from component V2.

The distribution of funds from the Municipal Budget line for support to CSOs is conducted through a public call that defines the areas of interest, as well as terms of reference and necessary documents that need to be presented with the application. CSOs note that the model of selection of project-proposals needs to be improved, with emphasis on transparency of the whole process.

The Municipality maintains solid levels of cooperation with CSOs, but it needs to establish clear procedures for cooperation and inclusion of CSOs in processes of creation of local policies. The existing practices are mostly ad hoc in their approach. However, they note Municipality's participation in preparation of joint project applications and/or im-

sations that usually approach the Municipality with proposals for partnerships related to specific and concrete donor calls for proposals and projects. The Municipality mainly responds positively to such proposals and secures endorsement and support letters.

That communication and cooperation with CSOs needs to intensify (in both directions) and to be channelled properly, that is, grow from ad hoc initiative into well planned and coordinated strategic cooperation. To make that model of cooperation operational, it would be necessary to intervene in the systemisation of jobs and positions of the municipal administration, that is, create a department of cooperation with CSOs. Also, in terms of capacity building (in the municipal administration and externally, with stakeholders), actual needs have to be mapped and cooperation with external associates should be established to implement training and capacity building activities to increase the capacity for preparation and implementation of projects. Additionally, the inter-sectoral cooperation needs to be strengthened further.

plementation of projects and activities funded by foreign donors.

The Municipality of Strumica has adopted Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society Organisations, covering the period 2015-2020. The Strategy focuses on four perspectives: Satisfied citizens (what does the civil sector expects from the Municipality); (2) Provision of services (which internal processes need to be introduced); (3) Development of capacities (education of employees and organisational growth); and (4) Budget management (how to finance activities)⁹.

As far as the civil sector is concerned, over the past several years, there is a notable negative trend in activities and absorption of municipal budgets for civic activities. The number of “professional” CSOs is small, compared to those that get active on ad hoc basis and have no continuous activities or, in fact, offices or permanent staff/activists.

The key challenges faced by the civil society organisations in Strumica are related to the limited financial sustainability opportunities and the lack of adequate human resources for their further development. Those challenges are noted in the Strategy 2015-2020 (the aspect of organisational growth). However, in reality there is noted drop of number of active CSOs.

According to the five CSOs that completed our online questionnaire or participated in the focus group, the CSOs mostly implement their activities with help of people hired on service contracts and volunteers. The weak performance effect of civic activities is evident in the size of average annual budgets available to the organisations. Majority of them never submitted project proposals to be funded from EU's IPA programmes.

Regarding the potential for cooperation of civil society organisations with the Municipality of Strumica, activists are unanimous that partnership is necessary and needs to be nourished. An opinion prevails that the municipal administration, under the auspices of its Strategy, has the opportunity to improve the mutual cooperation. The activists believe that the municipal administration and the CSOs should work together on preparation of project proposals that would apply for IPA funding. Such a partnership would be beneficial for both sides. For the civil society organisations, among other things, it will mean that the Municipality will help secure the necessary co-financing for the projects, something that most organisations can't do on their own. That is one of the reasons why they don't apply for IPA programmes.

⁹ Стратегија на Општина Струмица за соработка со граѓанскиот сектор: 2015-2020. Општина Струмица, 2015

Key Findings

The general assessment of the performance of Strumica Municipality regarding its capacities to use and programme IPA funds to serve local development priorities is characterized by the limited percentage of utilisation and absorption of available funds.

While the strategic framework of Strumica Municipality is in line with programming priorities of IPA, the past limited participation was due mainly to the obstruction efforts of the former national Government.

The absence of continuity of training and specialization of human resources of the municipal administration further aggravates the situation with use and absorption of EU funds.

The Municipality of Strumica occasionally applies the practice of ad hoc decisions in determining the priority of certain project proposals, without paying attention if they are in line (or not) with the local strategic goals and existing development framework. In addition, the findings indicate certain shortcomings of internal procedures for preparation, monitoring and record-keeping of submitted project-proposals.

We should note the Municipality of Strumica's practice to promote the importance and use of direct involvement of public enterprises and other local actors in the absorption of EU funds as a start of a successful model of cooperation.

The cooperation of the Municipality with CSOs is quite solid, but creation of clear procedures for cooperation and inclusion of CSOs in processes of creation of local policies is needed. In terms of existing systemisation of jobs and positions and organisational structure, the Municipality doesn't have a special department or office for cooperation with CSOs. The cooperation is conducted through the

departments of citizen services and local economic development. An opinion prevails among CSOs that the communication with the Municipality of Strumica needs to be improved, having in mind that they also share the opinion that the municipal administration, for the time being, lacks the will to engage in active cooperation with the civil sector.

The Municipality of Strumica is a fine example of sectoral programming of funds to support CSOs. The annual support programmes are focused on the local economic development and social welfare. The Municipality secures more than 3 mn MKD per year, one of the largest amounts dedicated to support for CSOs on local level in the country. Civil society organisations believe that the process of selection and allocation of financial support needs to be more transparent.

The Municipality believes that CSOs and other stakeholders may be useful partners in preparation and implementation of projects in the framework of EU programmes. The CSOs also view the Municipality as a desired partner. For the civil society organisations it would mean, among other things, greater ease in securing the necessary co-financing for the projects.

The key challenges faced by the civil society organisations in Strumica are related to the limited financial sustainability opportunities and the lack of adequate human resources for their further development.

Recommendations

The existing political will in the Municipality of Strumica and the absence of political barriers need to be transformed into concrete measures and activities that would lead to increased utilisation of funds made available by the European Union, in line with the municipal strategic development framework.

The municipal administration needs to continue its practice of systemic promotion of benefits from participation in EU's IPA programmes, both for the Municipality and for the public enterprises, CSOs, the business sector and the citizens in general. The model of successful cooperation at the local level could be promoted also as good practice that other regions and municipalities in the country could emulate.

The access to IPA funds implies undertaking of a series of preparatory steps, integrated into coherent development frameworks that will precisely identify the needs for upgrading of existing capacities. With that goal in mind, the Municipality of Strumica needs to constantly upgrade the capacities of the municipal administration. At the moment, priority areas for upgrading are: Informing the municipal administration with the details of EU's programmes and funds; project management and implementation of IPA projects (at basic and advanced levels); introduction to and application of PRAG procurement procedures; financial management; communication and promotion of project results; public advocacy and creation of evidence-based policies.

The capacities for utilisation and programming of IPA funds on local level need to be adequately systemized and in service of the strategic development priorities of the Municipality. Therefore, an efficient internal system needs to be put in place, together with proper organisational set-up, adequate human resources and mandate to follow, monitor and upgrade that system. In fact, the Municipality of Strumica needs to establish a system for sustainable development, with additional support to the DICEF which is charged with the mapping of local priorities and with preparation and implementation of development projects.

To improve the cooperation with the CSOs, the Municipality needs to establish a two-way dialogue with the civil sector, and also to create a department of cooperation with the CSOs. It needs to review the instruments for selection and monitoring of programmes for support to CSOs, with the aim to ensure greater transparency and accountability.

The Municipality needs to stimulate partnerships with CSOs under the auspices of the IPA programmes and to support the sustainability of the civil sector. The Municipality needs to restore its good practices of active inclusion of CSOs in the design and implementation of local development measures.

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- Macedonia - Greece IPA CBC programme 2007-2013
- Macedonia – Bulgaria IPA CBC programme 2014-2020
- Macedonia - Greece IPA CBC programme 2014-2020
- Multi-country indicative strategy paper (2014-2020)
- Cross-border cooperation: European priority and political objective of the EU
- Analysis of CSOs involvement in Cross-border cooperation programmes, Summary of the draft report for conference participants

Websites

- Official website of the Municipality of Strumica <http://www.strumica.gov.mk/>
- Official website of the Central Database on foreign assistance of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia <http://cdad.sep.gov.mk/>
- Official website of the Ministry of Local Self-Government <http://mls.gov.mk/>

List of Annexes

Annex 1: Questionnaire for interviews/focus group with representatives of the municipal administration

1. List EU's Programmes in which you have participated (used them) as a municipality (in the period from 2007 to this day)?

2. Number of submitted project proposals (in the period from 2007 to this day)?

3. Number of implemented projects (in the period from 2007 to this day)?

4. Which are the main benefits from the participation of municipalities in EU programmes?

- Development of partnerships in different sectors, focus and levels
- Working with partners (national and foreign) and exchange of knowledge and experience
- Financial benefits and financing of innovative initiatives
- Support for public-private partnerships (new models of cooperation with the local businesses)

5. How would you assess the expertise of the employees that work on projects financed by EU programmes?

- Fully trained
- Additional training is needed
- Minor abilities/abilities on level of basic information
- Insufficient ability and experience
- Have no information/No answer

6. Where do you locate the deficit of expert abilities of the employees?

- Experience
- Project management
- Knowledge of foreign languages
- Formal education
- Additional training

7. In your opinion, to what extent the internal capacities and experience influence the absorption of EU funds?
 - Fully influences the absorption of EU funds
 - Has great influence on the absorption of EU funds
 - Has no influence on the absorption of EU funds
 - Has little influence on the absorption of EU funds
8. In your opinion, how could the Municipality increase its participation in EU programmes?
 - Trainings, workshops, seminars, etc.
 - Enhanced activities of national support bodies
 - Increased promotion of the programmes and the benefits they bring
 - Improved inter-sectoral cooperation in preparation of project proposals that respond to real local needs
 - Adequate planning and correlation of local and national strategies with EU's Financial perspectives/programmes
9. Which of the listed potential/existing partners you find most useful for preparation and implementation of project under EU programmes?
 - Public institutions/enterprises
 - Business sector
 - Civil society organisations/foundations

Annex 2: Questionnaire for CSOs

1. In which municipality is your organisation registered?
 - Strumica
 - Skopje
 - Tetovo
 - Bitola
2. In general terms, what is the programming focus, that is, the geographic level of operation of your organisation? Which of the options listed below best reflects your work?
 - Local (city, municipality)
 - Regional (within the planning region)
 - National (Macedonia)
 - International (SEE/international)
 - Other, please note
3. What is the area of operation (sectoral focus) of your organisation? Please choose from the list below (you may select up to two answers)
 - Decentralisation
 - Social policies and employment
 - Democracy
 - Rule of law and fundamental rights
 - Culture
 - Media
 - Youth and youth policies
 - Agriculture and rural development
 - Sustainable and economic development
 - Tourism
 - Sport
 - Education
 - Services (for the private/public sector)
 - Other, please note
4. How many persons are employed by your organisation at the moment?
 - We have no employees, just persons engaged on service contracts
 - We have no employees or persons engaged on service contracts, we work on voluntary basis
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - More than 5

5. What is your average annual budget for the past five years (in EUR)?
 - Up to 5,000
 - From 5,000 to 20,000
 - From 20,000 to 50,000
 - 50.001 Up to 100,000
 - From 100,001 to 500,000
 - More than 500,000
 - I don't know/no answer
6. Has your organisation ever submitted a project application for financing from IPA funds, either as lead organisation or partner?
 - Yes, only as lead applicant
 - Yes, only as a partner
 - Yes, we have submitted applications both as lead applicants and as partners
 - No, we have never submitted application for IPA funding
7. In your opinion, which are the main benefits from the participation of your organisation in EU's IPA programmes? (you may select more than one answer)
 - Financial benefits
 - Access to funds for projects for which no national financing is available
 - Financing of innovative initiatives which wouldn't exist without EU support
 - Development of new partnerships through multiple sectors and levels
 - Working with and learning from partners/similar organisations from other countries
 - Sense of belonging to Europe
 - Don't know/no answer
8. Which of the listed general terms/factors would contribute to greater utilisation of EU's IPA funds? (you may select more than one answer)
 - Information about project opportunities from EU sources
 - More active support for lead institutions (ministries, contact points, municipalities, etc.)
 - Development and promotion of a culture of public-private partnerships
 - (Greater) accessibility of external sources of co-financing
 - Improved information and education about EU's development goals
 - Don't know/No answer
9. List the key challenges that influence the success of preparation of project proposals for IPA programmes? (you may select more than one answer)
 - Applications are in English
 - Complex and time-consuming application procedures
 - Inadequate criteria for evaluation of project applications
 - Insufficiently transparent process of evaluation of project applications
 - Lack of adequate partners (for joint application and implementation of projects)
 - Problems with ownership of projects
 - Huge competition for limited funding
 - High percentage of co-financing needed
 - Complex and inflexible procedures for monitoring, reporting and evaluation of projects

10. Do you implement/have you ever implemented project financed by IPA funds?
 - Yes
 - No
11. How many IPA projects have you implemented? (including ongoing projects, if any)
12. Did you implement the project(s) as ...
 - Lead applicant only
 - Partner organisation only
 - We have implemented projects in both capacities
13. You have implemented a project in partnership with which of the following entities? (you may select more than one answer)
 - Units of local self-government (municipalities)
 - NGOs
 - Centres for regional development
 - Public enterprises
 - Private sector
 - Other, please note
14. Projects you implement/have implemented were covered by which IPA programme?
 - IPA Cross Border Programme
 - IPA Operational Programme for Human Resources Development
 - IPA Civil Society Facility
 - IPA II
 - Other programme, please explain...
15. Does your organisation have employees responsible for preparation and implementation of project-proposals under EU's IPA programmes?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Other model, please explain
16. How many employees in your organisation are responsible and trained to prepare and implement project proposals under the EU's IPA Programmes?
 - 0
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - More than 5
17. How would you assess the expertise of employees responsible for preparation and implementation of IPA projects?
 - Fully trained
 - They need some additional education and training
 - Their knowledge is on the level of basic information about the project, training and abilities are insufficient
 - Insufficient experience
 - No experience
 - Don't know/no answer

- Other, please explain
18. If you find your employees to be insufficiently trained, where do you locate that lack of expertise and training? (you may select more than one answer)
- Knowledge of foreign languages/English language
 - Education and training
 - Knowledge about the subject of project management
 - Experience
 - Don't know/No answer
 - Other, please explain
19. In your opinion, who shall be responsible for building of capacities of your organisation's staff to prepare and implement EU projects? (you may select more than one answer)
- Your organisation
 - Public institutions (Government)/institutions responsible for EU integrations
 - Public institutions (Government) and your organisation
 - Public institutions (Government), your organisation and other partners
 - Employees who work (will work) in that area
 - Don't know/no answer
 - Other, please explain
20. If no employee works on preparation of projects, would your institution:
- Train some of the existing staff
 - Seek services from an external consultant(s)
 - Employ a qualified person(s)
 - Don't know/No answer
 - Other, please explain
21. One requirement for use of funds from EU's IPA programmes is for users to provide a share of co-financing. How would you estimate the financial condition of your organisation?
- We can provide the full co-financing on our own
 - We can provide only a fragment of the necessary co-financing
 - We can't provide any co-financing
 - Don't know/No answer
22. How would you evaluate the access to sources of co-financing for IPA projects?
- There are sufficient external sources of co-financing
 - There are too few external sources of co-financing
 - There are no external sources of co-financing
 - Don't know/No answer
23. Which (potential) partners you can count on for the co-financing of projects of your organisation? (you may select more than one answer)
- Organisations that work in the same field and area of interest
 - Municipalities/ULS/Public enterprises
 - Public institutions (on national/regional level)
 - Business sector
 - Chambers of commerce
 - Banks
 - Other financial institutions
 - Other partners

- Don't know/No answer
24. Which of the activities listed below may help overcome the obstacles to greater use of EU's IPA funds? (you may select more than one answer)
- Training, workshops, seminars, etc.
 - Simplified rules by EU's IPA programmes
 - Activities of national support bodies (assistance to find funding opportunities, finding partners and preparation of applications)
 - Activities to promote the Programmes (more publications, info-days)
 - Creation of special funds for co-financing of EU projects
 - Access to adequate sources of co-financing (banks, other financial institutions, etc.)
 - Simplified procedures for administration and financial management of projects
 - Simplified procedures for application, reporting and auditing of projects
25. Have you cooperated with ULS/Centre for regional development/Public enterprise in preparation or implementation of IPA project?
- Yes
 - No
 - If yes, please note which Municipality/Centre for regional development/Public enterprise was involved
26. Have you ever been involved (as a CSO or as representative of the civil sector) in processes of programming of IPA programme or other EU programme?
- Yes
 - No
 - If Yes, please note in which form – consultation meetings/processes, as contributor, etc.
27. In your opinion, how could your organisation's participation in IPA programmes be increased?
28. Please list what types of trainings would you find useful to increase the capacities of your organisation for greater absorption of IPA funds?
29. Do you have some proposal to stimulate and promote cooperation between CSOs, municipalities and other actors to facilitate cooperation regarding IPA programmes?