Involvement of citizens in decision-making during the months of the pandemic was one of the biggest concerns of municipalities. Municipalities were constantly looking for new ways to involve citizens without endangering their health. The DEMOS project was always there to help municipalities hold meetings with citizens. Aware of the responsibilities, the DEMOS team continued to work from home and immediately began conducting virtually all activities to provide assistance to the municipalities and maintain the health of the participants.

Involvement of citizens in decision-making is one of the main indicators of democracy, but most municipalities, due to the current situation, found it almost impossible to hold regular meetings with citizens, making this the point that has been most influenced mostly from this situation.

In this new arrangement with quarantine and security measures, all DEMOS efforts are directed to assist local governments in the continuation of democratic governance.

The DEMOS team, during these months of the pandemic, has held virtual meetings with mayors, directors and other municipal representatives.

Together with them, the various possibilities and ways of support that DEMOS can offer in order to put into operation the idea of online meetings with citizens were examined. It also discussed the Municipal Performance Grant and the individual performance of municipalities in democratic governance, municipal management and service delivery.

The challenges faced by municipalities and the opportunities to improve their performance were also discussed. Furthermore, we stressed the importance of accountability, transparency, participation as the main principles of any local democracy.

The idea behind conducting online meetings with citizens is to support citizen participation in the decision-making process as well as to help municipalities meet the minimum standards of public consultation on important topics. In this way, municipalities will ensure greater transparency and accountability towards their citizens. Furthermore, by facilitating online meetings with citizens, municipalities can also improve their performance in the Municipal Performance Grant.

However, only nine of the thirty-six municipalities contacted have expressed their interest in having online meetings with citizens and then only 5 of them asked for our support.

Although there is a large number of social media users, the interest of citizens to participate in online meetings was very small, while the number of women participants was even lower. This tells us that new and innovative opportunities need to be explored to stimulate greater interest of citizens in public affairs and to hold their municipal representatives accountable.
“The recently created situation, not only in Kosovo, but all over the globe, can be seen not only as a health crisis, but also as an opportunity to change and adopt different ways to make better use of available technology, to develop new channels and mechanisms of participation in order to bridge the gap between decision-makers and citizens”

DEMOS project

Municipalities that have held online meetings with citizens

- Municipality of Gjilan
- Municipality of Rahovec
- Municipality of Klina
- Municipality of Kamenica
- Municipality of Prishtina
Trainings as a solution to improve performance

Here at DEMOS the capacity building trainings have continued even via computer screens. Over the years, referring to the results of the municipal performance, the audit reports and the needs assessment report, the DEMOS’s staff has created the training needs scheme, by referring to the weakest points of municipal performance. The purpose of these trainings is to help municipalities strengthen their performance towards democratic governance and management.

To better understand and find out about the most common challenges and capacity building needs of the municipalities in Kosovo, DEMOS has held a virtual meeting with representatives from different municipalities, which have completed the questionnaires by selecting priority trainings from a list of proposed topics, and have also identified additional, specific challenges for municipalities.

The questionnaires results pointed out the need to organise trainings in the area of the “implementation of the audit recommendation” and “discussion of the municipal performance report in the municipal assemblies”.

The trainings on external auditor recommendations and reporting on the municipal performance are divided into four modules, which were provided to municipal officials and assembly members of all municipalities in Kosovo.

“The modules are highly specific and relevant to the needs of municipalities and are very useful and concrete to be implemented in practice,” explains Merita Barileva, Intervention Manager at DEMOS.

As part of the training about the addressing of the audit recommendations, around 100 municipal officials have participated and gained new knowledge and skills about the control systems and risk management, capital investment planning and budgeting, project management process and financial reporting.

According to Dardan Maliqi, trainings serve municipalities to enhance their performance and develop so that the same auditor recommendations are not repeated.

“The purpose of the online training is to help municipal officials improve their performance in relation to the Municipal Performance Grant. The training is about addressing the real training needs of municipal officials in the field of municipal management, with a particular focus on the indicator addressing the recommendations of the external auditor that will contribute to enhancing municipal performance, and consequently not to repeat the same recommendations for future addressing in relation to this indicator”, he said.
The training modules, performance management system, democratic governance, municipal management and municipal services were part of the discussion of the municipal performance report in the municipal assemblies training delivered to more than 350 municipal assembly members and other relevant municipal officials.

Municipal officials that took part in these trainings consider that trainings are also necessary for people who have been working in institutions for years.

‘These trainings are indispensable despite the fact that some of us gave been for a long time in institutions, and changes in processes and refreshing of knowledge by both trainers and peer exchanges (municipal participants) have been extraordinary,’ said Xhevahire Rushiti, Chief Financial Officer in the municipality of Mamusha.

Jetush Rrafshi, an auditor from the municipality of Shtime, shares the same opinion.

“The trainings held have been extremely necessary, as we need such trainings with a focus on refreshing the knowledge on financial management and complementing the training programs necessary for Budget Organizations”, he said.

In addition to the participants who have benefited from these trainings, they have also passed on the knowledge gained to other officials.

‘For me personally they have had a very positive effect as I have gained new knowledge from all the modules. I also forwarded the material of all the modules to all the directors so that they can then be forwarded to their officials’, said Xhevahire Rushiti, participant.

This year, the pandemic situation had caused the trainings to be held online, where apart from some minor technical problems, there was no obstacle in gaining knowledge.

“The circumstances under which trainings took place this year have caused for limitation to participation and conducting of the training, but in any case they helped refresh our knowledge on the implementation of the recommendations from the Auditors’ Reports and new guidelines for investments and capital projects from the Ministry of Finance as well as project management as a new topic from the DEMOS project”, said Jetush Rrafshi.

In addition to training, DEMOS also holds communication or advocacy programs for those areas where training is not the solution, such as the inclusion of women in public meetings, as one of the weakest indicators, which is more of a social norms product that can be solved through communication or advocacy to promote the inclusion of women.

DEMOS conducts trainings only in areas and municipalities where institutions and other organizations have not provided capacity building support. Also, to make the trainings more comprehensible, they are organized in smaller groups.
Training is provided for the Electronic Municipal Performance Management System

On 22 December last year, the Ministry of Local Government, in cooperation with the DEMOS project, started holding trainings on the use of the Electronic Municipal Performance Management System. These trainings were attended by municipal performance coordinators and municipal reporting officers.

The electronic system will start to be applied in 2021, on the occasion of the next cycle of measuring the performance of municipalities. This system offers the possibility of online performance reporting, reduces the administrative burden for measuring municipal performance, increases data security, quality and documentation, allows comparative access of data by fields and indicators for unlimited periods of time, and provides direct access to citizens regarding the performance of municipalities.
Involvement of citizens in decision-making is one of the main points of democratic governance. However, according to the performance report, this indicator has a small percentage of development.

In 2019, only 1.51% of the total number of Kosovo citizens participated in meetings organized by municipalities throughout Kosovo.

The worries, problems and needs of the citizens are heard when they present these before the municipality, the non-participation in the decision-making in the municipality by the citizens makes it impossible for their voice to be heard.

Thus, to show the importance of citizen involvement, DEMOS has launched the campaign ‘Be the Voice of Your City’
Within this campaign, three awareness videos were made: Citizen for the municipality, Citizen participation in decision-making and Municipality for the citizen. Through which the public was informed about the participation in decision-making, and how important it is for the municipality to seek the involvement of citizens and vice versa, how important the involvement of citizens is for the municipality.

For a democratic government, the municipality must listen to the citizen, while the citizen must express his/her problems and interests.

In the course of this campaign, a webinar was held on the participation and involvement of citizens in local decision-making during the pandemic. This webinar was attended by representatives of civil society organizations, municipalities, professors and students from UBT - University of Business and Technology, Riinvest International College - LSE in Kosovo and the University of Prishtina.

Ertan Munoglu, DEMOS project manager, in this meeting, expressed concern about the low participation of citizens in public meetings over the years and also mentioned the challenges related to virtual meetings of municipalities organized with the support of the DEMOS project.

The mayor of Kamenica, Qëndron Kastrati, and the mayor of Rahovec, Smajl Latifi, presented the challenges and problems that these municipalities have faced during this period of the pandemic and the involvement of citizens in decision-making.

Also, Ngadhnjim Halliaj, project manager of D4D, presented the report on the performance of municipalities in the field of communication with citizens.

Part of the webinar were also students who were interested in municipal governance and what they can do to involve the largest number of citizens in the future.
What is the significance of the Municipal Performance Grant for municipalities?

“The Performance Grant has strengthened and promoted the growth and improvement of services for citizens, the environmental protection, the health and well-being of citizens, and tourism development as a precondition for local economic development”.

Agron Kuqi,
Mayor of the Municipality of Junik

“Being part of a sound competition is a proof of the effort to provide the citizens with public services of the best possible quality”.

Rufki Suma,
Mayor of the Municipality of Hani i Elezit

“The Performance Grant is of special importance to the Municipality of Dragash/Dragaš because it enables the support to important community-based projects. It stimulates local government in self-improvement and creates opportunities to achieve better results in increasing transparency, citizen involvement and quality of governance in all areas”.

Shaban Shabani,
Mayor of the Municipality of Dragash

“The Performance Grant is a challenge for our municipality. Through it, we try to improve the services that the municipality provides to citizens. We will raise awareness and affirm them to be involved in the work of the municipality and decision-making processes. The grant enables us, in addition to raising the living conditions of our citizens, to stimulate the work of our departments and services”.

Vladica Aritonovic,
Mayor of the Municipality of Ranillug
WHAT DOES AN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT MUNICIPALITY MEAN

Full transparency, access to public documents and citizen’s participation in processes of general interest, makes the municipality more reliable and open to citizens.

WHAT DO WE BENEFIT FROM AN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT MUNICIPALITY

Better services such as: in healthcare, education, environment protection and infrastructure.

Save public money through open and transparent procurement, by publishing documents and contract

Prevent corruption through municipal transparency, reporting and implementation of the integrity plan and strengthening of civil society.

Gain citizen’s trust and strengthen accountability by making municipal assembly meetings public, and publishing the minutes of public consultation processes.

According to the Municipal Performance Report 2019, data related to the indicators in the field of transparency reported by 36 municipalities of Kosovo.

- Municipal Assembly meetings made public and broadcasted live online: 59.13%
- Meeting the criteria for the official website of the municipality: 70.83%
- Publication of public procurement documents of the municipality: 70.18%
- Reporting the annual integrity plan to the municipal assembly: 27.78%