

## Enhancing Youth Employment in Kosovo: A Positive Reflection on Achievements and Prospects

### **Introduction**

This report describes the achievements, strengths and ambitions of the people working in the EYE project in Kosovo. It is a record of a discussion of EYE staff held during a workshop in Korce in March 2023. The workshop was intended to help EYE staff take stock of the project story so far and to consider in a positive light what they wanted to achieve in the remaining time before the end of the project in December 2024.

It is hoped that this report will be useful to the leadership of projects that are looking for ways to maintain or even increase enthusiasm, creativity and commitment in the final stage of a project. The report can also inform those that use the market systems development approach as it shows what aspects of the project are valued as strengths and foundations for the success of the project.

The workshop used the appreciative inquiry method in a simple and short form. The method was selected as it is supportive and positive, helping participants to identify what aspects of the project enabled its success. This is a contrast to the usual critical analysis methods used in end-of-year or end-of-phase reviews that identify project weaknesses, failures, mistakes as well as strengths and success. It was considered that the appreciative inquiry method might be more effective at eliciting what helps EYE to succeed.

### **Workshop Method**

During a 90 minute period, staff of EYE and supporting administrative colleagues – around 10-15 people - were divided into small groups of 3-4 people and asked to answer the key questions of appreciative inquiry:

- What success has EYE achieved across all three phases?
- What are our strengths?
- What would we like to achieve in the future, what are our dreams for future success?
- How can we use our strengths to make the dream come true?

The tone of the discussion was fun, enjoyable, optimistic, appreciative, realistic and honest. A facilitator assisted groups to complete the tasks. There was some informal interaction between groups due to the small working space which enhanced the sense of whole-team working together. Each small group wrote their responses to each question on one A5-sized card. At the end of the discussions, there was a break after which the team reassembled to listen and respond as the facilitator summarized the responses with the following introductory statements: 'we, the people of EYE, who have achieved so much .....using our notable and many strengths.....intend to continue to the end of the project and dream of achieving more success.....'

## Results

The table below summarises the responses from the group to each question.

What success has EYE achieved in all phases?	Count our strengths today?	What would we like to achieve in the future? Dream Big!	How can we use our strengths? ...What needs to change? ...How to make dream come true?
Changed mindset; e.g. Print to Pixel! Central institutions became a supporter of the sector vision.	We have good humor	VET Schools operate on a business model	Communicate more
Changed business models of TPs	Excellent team Supportive finance and admin team	Strong voice of the career counsellors' network	Be more open to change
Pioneers of change in career centers	Adaptive management	Leave the legacy for others, to continue the work of EYE	Use the current network
Go over boundaries	Continuous training	Serve as knowledge-broker	Be more assertive, courage. "Fly the flag"
Be well branded	Teamwork	5% unemployment by 2030	
Established good reputation	Networking, openness, trustworthy, patient, tolerant	Change mindset and social restrains	
Deliver sustainable results	Strong expertise	Change of mindset and behavior of youth and businesses	
Unqualified audit report	Approach – clear goal	Sustainable training centers without donors	
Influence others KML (Role Model)	Good MRM system	Reduce immigration	
Pioneer in MSD	Resilience – we keep going despite all the "stuff" that happens	Create a healthy society	
Matched non-majority people to jobs in Agri sector	We take care of each other (Lemon > Margarita)	The spirit of EYE must continue	
We successfully get partners to deliver		Public and Private JMS bound cooperation to happen organically	
From pilot to successful institutionalization of CCs +KJobs		Create a future youth fund	
Eco-system on non-formal education of youngsters		Spin-off of EYE	
Build lasting partnerships		Private sector finance VET Schools	

The responses of the group deserve some elaboration to be more fully understood.

**Achievements** were about changing the mindset of business, consumer or government as a foundation for long-term transformation in the market system. One example given was of changing the way that job matching is done, from posting printed notices in public spaces to online portals. The project also changed the business strategy or 'business model' of training providers so that they are more willing to aim to be financially sustainable rather than depending on grants from aid-funded projects. Being a pioneer was mentioned as an achievement which may be linked to another point about establishing a good reputation and strong brand in the market system as an effective facilitator of change. This is partly due to the length of the project but mainly due to the quality of the facilitation, relevance of the interventions and the trusted partnerships that have been established. Working beyond boundaries was cited as an achievement. The project is willing to go beyond the expectations of the project design (logframe targets and approach) to achieve more and to work in an integrated way combining aspects of interventions in a synergistic manner. The project also celebrates its success in influencing the market systems in which it intervenes through sharing information and knowledge. The establishment of a network of career advisory centres at vocational schools was highlighted as an achievement which took ten years and required slow, patient, intelligent facilitation to create, test, modify and finalise a new multi-stakeholder partnership that already owns and sustains the new service. It is an example of a general achievement that was noted: building partnerships that last a long time. In all phases, the project has achieved or exceeded the targets that were set by SDC. The project has also been successful at making markets more socially inclusive for people in Kosovo's non-majority communities. Finally, a long record of unqualified audit reports was recognized as a hard-won achievement by EYE staff and their colleagues working in the central services team.

**Strengths** were notably about the human, personal and collaborative nature of the EYE team: cheerfulness, resilient, supporting each other, making the best of difficult situations. An emphasis was placed on adaptive management styles, strong expertise and investing in training to improve skills. In terms of partnerships, the responses highlighted the strengths that the EYE team had in networking based on trust and transparency, being patient and tolerant to broker the partnership. Trust is a crucial element in any successful partnership as it establishes a solid foundation for collaboration and mutual understanding. Finally, the existence of a clear goal and good systems for measuring progress were identified as strengths of the team.

The **dream** part of the discussion was a non-judgmental experience during which participants were free to set their hearts and minds loose to share their big ambitions. There were some specific points related to the career guidance intervention about the sustainability of the vocational schools and the career counsellors' network. But there were also broader, high-level ambitions to reduce emigration, reduce unemployment and creating a healthy society. One set of responses were about the continuation of EYE's role as a facilitator and knowledge broker. Finally, there were some responses regarding improved public-private partnerships on job matching and reduced dependence on aid donors by training businesses.

The most difficult part of the discussion was identifying which of the EYE team's strengths could be used to **deliver the dream**. It was clear that having more courage, being more assertive and communicating more was important, as was leveraging the project's network and being open to change.

## **Discussion and Implications**

The most remarkable aspect of this discussion was the absence of terms and concepts that are normally mentioned during discussions about private sector, market systems or economic development, such as: leveraging private sector investment, competition, market-oriented reforms, access to finance, business development services, entrepreneurship, inclusive growth, market failures, systems thinking. Instead, the focus was on attitude, emotion, social networks, personal influence, commitment to social change, reputation, brokering partnerships, teamwork, mutual support, resilience, collaboration, and cheerfulness. Perhaps this is an insight that market systems development projects would be wise to consider: success is not about the financial economy but about the social economy and that change is enabled and sustained more through influence, facilitation and partnerships than by grants and external financial incentives.

If this is an insight that could be applied in other projects, then organisations that implement projects could consider how they signal to project staff the value and importance of these outcomes and how they foster the development of the appropriate strengths by the project team. Projects might also consider using the appreciative inquiry method at key points of the project's journey, for example, between phases or mid-term reviews. Those involved in designing the logical framework or key performance indicators for projects could also consider whether there is enough emphasis at the outcome level on attitude, will, commitment, resolve and partnerships as foundations for achieving lasting and large-scale impact.

It is worth considering the strengths and limitations of using the appreciative inquiry method. At the end of this brief report, there is an outline of the method. Overall, it is considered that the positive and open style of discussion was enabled by using the method which would not have been so easy if a more traditional critical analysis, such as SWOT, had been used. Participants reported that they enjoyed the discussion, and it was clearly more personal and owned than a more rigorous, wide-ranging, conceptual and intellectual discussion. Although no limits were set by the facilitator on the discussion, participants tended to focus on the EYE team – themselves and their closest administrative colleagues in Kosovo. Perhaps, if the facilitator had suggested or encouraged consideration of wider influences, the team may have highlighted institutional sources of strength or achievement beyond this focus.

Finally, it is not clear why the last part of the discussion was so incomplete. It could be that by this time participants were a little tired of the group dynamics, that they were anticipating lunch, or that it is particularly tricky to put the two parts together (strengths that realise dreams). More discussion on this aspect of the analysis might help elicit more insights.

## **Conclusion**

The EYE project in Kosovo has achieved significant success and made notable achievements in various areas, including changing mindsets, transforming market systems, establishing long-lasting partnerships, and influencing social inclusivity. The project's length, quality facilitation, and trusted partnerships have contributed to its reputation and effectiveness.

The strengths of the EYE team lie in their collaborative and resilient nature, adaptive management styles, expertise, networking abilities, and clear goals with effective measurement systems. The

team's personal qualities, such as cheerfulness and mutual support, played a crucial role in navigating challenges and making the best of difficult situations.

The dreams expressed by the EYE team during the workshop encompassed a range of ambitions, including sustaining vocational schools and career guidance networks, reducing emigration and unemployment, creating a healthy society, and improving public-private partnerships. The team also aspired to continue their role as facilitators and knowledge brokers while reducing dependence on aid donors.

The absence of traditional economic development concepts and the focus on attitude, emotion, social networks, personal influence, and collaboration highlight the importance of the social economy and non-financial factors in driving lasting change. This insight suggests that projects should emphasize influence, facilitation, and partnerships as foundations for achieving significant and sustainable impact, rather than solely relying on financial incentives.

Overall, the use of the appreciative inquiry method proved effective in fostering positive and open discussions among the EYE team, leading to personal ownership and enjoyment of the process. However, there were limitations in the discussion's scope, as the focus remained primarily on the EYE team itself, potentially neglecting other institutional sources of strength and achievement. Further exploration of the link between strengths and realizing dreams could provide additional insights.

**Why is EYE successful?** Because it is locally-led and owned, inspired by a national vision and delivered through competent local institutions working in partnership. In contrast, market systems projects frequently fail after the final evaluation, because they are driven by external aid agendas, with foreign staff in most leadership positions and over-relying on quantitative economic and business analysis.

## Annex: An Outline of the Appreciative Inquiry Method

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a method of organizational development and change management that focuses on identifying and amplifying the strengths and positive aspects of an organization, rather than solely focusing on its weaknesses or problems. It is based on the principle that organizations and individuals grow and develop in the direction of their positive experiences and successes, rather than their negative experiences and failures.

AI involves a structured and collaborative process of inquiry and dialogue that engages stakeholders in a positive and constructive way, to envision and co-create a future that is desired and valued by the organization. The process typically involves four stages:

1. *Discovery*: Identifying the positive aspects and strengths of the organization by asking open-ended, appreciative questions that focus on past successes and best practices.
2. *Dream*: Imagining and articulating a vision of a desired future for the organization, based on the positive aspects and strengths identified in the discovery phase.
3. *Design*: Developing and planning specific actions and strategies to achieve the desired future, based on the vision created in the dream phase.
4. *Destiny*: Implementing and sustaining the changes and actions identified in the design phase, by continuously monitoring progress, celebrating successes, and adjusting course as needed.

AI is often used in a variety of organizational contexts, such as strategic planning, team building, leadership development, and culture change initiatives. It is a collaborative and participatory approach that engages stakeholders at all levels of the organization, and can lead to increased motivation, engagement, and positive outcomes for the organization.

Although the appreciative inquiry method has many benefits, it is not without its criticisms. Here are some of the criticisms of AI:



1. *Limited Focus on Problems*: One criticism of AI is that it focuses primarily on identifying and amplifying positive aspects of an organization, without sufficiently addressing the problems and challenges that the organization may be facing. Critics argue that by ignoring or downplaying problems, organizations may miss opportunities to improve and grow.
2. *Biased Perspective*: Another criticism of AI is that it may be biased towards the perspectives of those who are involved in the process. For example, if the participants in the AI process are

primarily senior leaders or members of the dominant culture, the positive aspects and strengths identified may not reflect the experiences and perspectives of all members of the organization.

3. *Lack of Empirical Evidence:* Some critics argue that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of AI as a method of organizational development and change management. While there is anecdotal evidence and case studies that suggest AI can lead to positive outcomes, there is a need for more rigorous research to confirm these findings.
4. *Overemphasis on Positive Emotions:* Critics argue that the emphasis on positive emotions in AI can be limiting, as it may ignore or downplay negative emotions that may be important for understanding and addressing problems in the organization. Additionally, some people may feel uncomfortable or pressured to be positive, which could inhibit open and honest dialogue.
5. *Lack of Attention to Power Dynamics:* Finally, critics argue that AI may not adequately address power dynamics within an organization, including issues of inequality and marginalization. Without addressing these issues, AI may reinforce existing power structures and limit opportunities for change and growth.

Overall, while appreciative inquiry has many benefits, it is important to be aware of these criticisms and address them appropriately to ensure the effectiveness of the process.