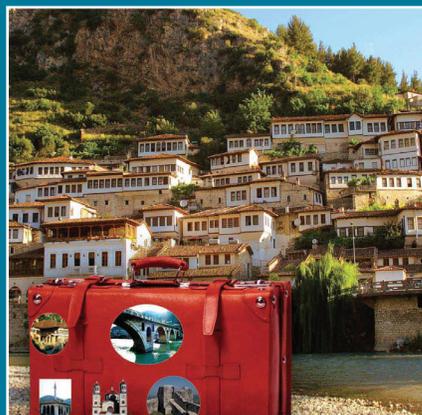
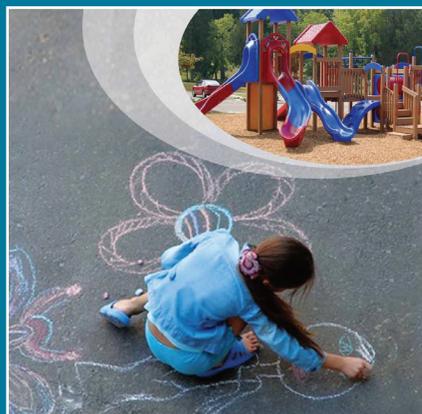


ADVOCACY AND LOCAL ELECTION



PARTNERS ALBANIA EXPERIENCE, 2011

ADVOCACY AND LOCAL ELECTION PARTNERS ALBANIA EXPERIENCE, 2011

Prepared by: Klotilda Tavani Kosta
Kostandina Këruti

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Partners Albania Center for Change and Conflict Management

Street “Muhamet Gjollësia” p.16/1, Ent.1, App.9, Tirana

PO Box 2418/1

Tel: +355 42 254881

Fax: +355 42 254883

E-mail: partners@partnersalbania.org

Website: www.partnersalbania.org

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On May 8, 2011 Albania held the local elections for Mayors and Local Government Councils. These were the first local election held according to the Electoral Code adopted in 2008.

While the democracy in Albania is still emerging, the need for strengthening democratic practices and institutions remains crucial. For this reason, Partners Albania implemented for the second time an advocacy approach to support the democratization process, through introduction and implementation of democratic practices of citizens' participation in electoral processes.

This initiative helped to increase citizen participation in the local electoral process; improve the level of communication between citizens and future local leaders; foster dialogue and influence of citizens and civil society in the agenda of the candidates for Mayor and increase accountability of elected leaders. This initiative showed citizens how to use elections to achieve common goals through working together.

Partners Albania assisted civil society organizations and other interest groups such as intellectuals, students, women, etc. in establishing local coalitions and identifying priority issues. PA also worked towards increasing their capacity to design and implement advocacy campaigns around priority issues identified. Advocacy campaigns culminated in getting the pledges to realize the local issues, from all candidates for mayor in Berat, Elbasan, Korca and Pogradec. Monitoring of the promises and discussion meetings between coalitions and elected mayors of respective municipalities followed the local elections, in the effort to identify ways how to keep these pledges and to mobilize all stakeholders at the local level.

This publication emphasizes practices of citizens' participation in the election campaign for local government that resulted during the project implementation. It aims to build the confidence of Albanian citizens about their impact and contribution to a democratic electoral process and participatory governance.

2. CONTEXT

Local Government Elections in Albania held on May 8, 2011 resulted in the election of Mayors and Councils for 384 Local Government Units (Municipalities, Communes, and Municipality Units in Tirana). According to the data from CEC, 51 % of 3.1 million voters participated in the voting process, throughout the country. This percentage is slightly higher than the last local elections of 2007, when only 47% of the voters participated in the elections. Despite the increase, this percentage that is an indicator of citizens' participation in democratic processes, remains at low levels, and once again shows the low confidence of citizens to political parties.

The elections of May 8, 2011, were held in a very tense and polarized political climate, following the parliamentary elections of June 28, 2009, from which the Democratic Party in coalition with the Socialist Movement for Integration won by majority of votes and formed the new government of Albania. The results of the parliamentary elections of June 28, 2009 were never accepted by the Socialist Party that boycotted the parliament until March 2011. The boycott was led by various manifestations and protests against the government that culminated in the protest of 21 January 2011, which resulted in the death of four protesters and other protestors and police forces injured as a consequence of violent confrontations between them.

This tense situation was reflected even during the electoral campaign of the 2011 Local Elections, where incidents and harsh rhetoric were present between candidates and political forces they represented.

Incidents and violence were also present during the Election Day in some prefectures, among sympathisants and also candidates in sporadic cases. As never before, candidates in these elections in almost all LGUs refused to publicly debate with each other in the presence of citizens, on daily issues and concrete alternatives toward their solution.

This situation is also quoted in the Preliminary Conclusion of Local Election 2011 Report, issued by the Coalition of Domestic Observers (coalition composed by non for profit and non partisan organizations: "It is noticed very few media public debates between candidates. Mainly the campaign is being implemented by the candidates through "door to door" and "face to face" meetings. In some cases, candidates have used aggressive and offensive tones against each other, culminating sporadically even in other forms of conflict"

Despite the positive changes that marked these elections with regard to voter's lists and wide media coverage, in terms of civic participation as a fundamental feature of democracy, they showed that there are still difficulties in building sustainable partnerships, equal sharing of responsibilities among stakeholders,

establishment of community groups and sometimes difficulties in information dissemination. Often these difficulties are caused by lack of sufficient capacity from local groups to translate various interest issues into common purpose and to bring them into political attention. Lack of communication between elected leaders and the communities they represent is another hindering factor for the active citizens' participation.

3. PARTNERS ALBANIA INITIATIVE

Partners Albania believes that the electoral campaign is an ideal opportunity to draw the attention of candidates for local government leaders toward local priority issues in their communities. Partners Albania, also believes in the strength of local NGOs and other interest groups to influence the agenda of local leaders on these issues.

Based on this belief, Partners Albania started in September 2010 the implementation of the project "Strengthening democratic practices of active citizens participation in electoral processes" in Korça, Pogradec, Berat and Elbasan. The project was supported by Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall Fund and the American Embassy in Albania.

This initiative aimed to strengthen democracy in the country through active participation of citizens in electoral processes.

PA initiative consisted in establishment of active local groups in the targeted cities, capacity building, facilitation, support and advice to design and implement advocacy campaigns and monitor the promises made by candidates for mayor during electoral campaign, in support of citizens' interests.

The initiative followed the successful experience of the 2007 Local Elections, in which Partners Albania, under the Democracy and Governance Program in Albania, supported civil society groups in seven cities to organize advocacy campaigns under the slogan "I support Good Governance".

The PA initiative "I support Good Governance", implemented in the framework of local elections 2011, consisted in the following main components:

3.1. Phase I: Establishment of local coalitions

The initiative started with the identification of civil society groups in the selected cities, willing to contribute to improve local democracy. Roundtables were organized in each city, aiming to introduce the initiative to local stakeholders and invite them to actively participate in this initiative as part of a local coalition

that would design and implement the advocacy campaign around a public interest issue chosen by them.

As a result, coalitions of 15 to 20 members were established in each city, consisting mainly of representatives from NGOs and other groups such as intellectuals, students, women, etc. Each coalition was named by its members, as follows:

- Korça - Coalition for Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes
- Pogradec - Coalition to Support Families in Need
- Berat - Coalition for Tourism Development
- Elbasan - Coalition to Help Children Living as Children

3.2. Phase II: Capacity building

The members of the local coalitions came from different experiences and backgrounds, and many of them were not involved in advocacy campaigns and similar initiatives before. As a result, the next step in the process was to increase their capacity in “Cooperative Advocacy” issues.

PA designed training programs to increase the knowledge and skills of the coalition members in two directions: **Advocacy and Lobbying** to help them identify priority issues, design and implement advocacy campaigns, as well as **Local Government Monitoring Techniques** to enable them monitor the pledges made by the elected leaders in working for their priority issues.

The topics discussed in the training programs were related to the advocacy campaign, media relations, message development, coalition building, constituency mobilization, lobbying techniques, local government monitoring techniques, etc.

3.3. Phase III: Design of advocacy campaign

Under the PA assistance and based on the knowledge, skills and techniques learned during the training programs, coalition members worked on strategic planning of advocacy campaigns that would take place during the electoral campaign, to influence the agenda of the candidates for mayor in the respective cities. Initially, the coalitions worked to identify and select key issues and priority needs of citizens. Then, members of the coalitions developed a detailed strategic plan with specific actions to draw the attention of citizens and stakeholders on the chosen issue, and to identify allies and supporters for the campaign.

After discussions on the priority needs set forth by all members, coalitions chose to work on the following issues:

- Korça** – Developing a local youth strategy
- Pogradec** – Creating employment opportunities for women, head of families in need.
- Berat** – Tourism development through strengthening the role and competences of the Tourism Office in the Municipality
- Elbasan** – Creation of public parks for children

3.4. Phase IV: Implementation of advocacy campaign

This phase was closely linked with specific activities designed by the coalitions in each city, in accordance with the selected issue. Regardless the specific activities according to the issue in the respective cities, the main elements of each advocacy campaign were:

Promotional activities: Coalitions designed the message and slogan for the advocacy campaigns. To deliver the campaign message, inform citizens and mobilize stakeholders of the initiative, posters were produced and distributed and banners were displayed in main streets of every city. Advocacy campaigns were led by the following slogans:

- Korça** – Youth in decision-making, more opportunities, more solutions!
- Pogradec** – Support a mother - head of family, help a family!
- Berat** – Tourism, the future which guarantee prosperity!
- Elbasan** – More spaces for our children!

Mobilization of supporters: During the pre-election period, the members of the coalition organized meetings, roundtables and discussions with different local stakeholders such as businesses, media, est., to identify and increase the number of supporters. The coalitions drafted a “Position Paper” which served to represent to the candidates and political parties the advocacy issue and proposed alternatives for solution or improvements. At the meetings with the candidates, the members of the coalition invited them to participate in open forums with citizens, to present their platform and discuss community issues.

Open forums with the candidates for Mayor: As it was expected, based also on previous experiences, this was the most challenging component of the advocacy campaign. The open forums were preceded by intensive lobbying and negotiations with political parties and all candidates for mayor in Berat, Elbasan, Korçë dhe Pogradec. The forums were designed as an opportunity for the candidates to present their program and answer to the questions from citizens. The citizens would have been informed about specific strategies to improve the situation regarding the selected priority issues. At the end of the forums, the candidates would have signed pledges in presence of public and media. Open forums would have been broadcasted by local and national television stations. As it happened in other cities, due to the tense political situation, open forums with candidates were not organized. Most candidates were willing to discuss about priority issues with members of the coalition and their supporters, but they refused to participate in open forums in the presence of other candidates.

Instead of open forums, the coalitions held individual meetings with all the candidates where they signed pledges, committing themselves to work for the local interest issue once elected as Mayor.

Before the Election Day, coalitions held a press conference in presence of local media, to inform citizens about the results of the advocacy campaign, and the sign of pledges made by the candidates.

3.5. Phase V: Monitoring of electoral pledges

After the certification of mayors and municipal councils from the CEC, the initiative followed with monitoring of the promises made by the mayors.

Partners Albania held local workshops with members of coalitions in Korça, Pogradeci, Berati and Elbasani, to develop a detailed action plan with specific activities for monitoring of the progress in regard to their issue. Each coalition organized meetings with elected Mayors to bring to their attention the promises made during the election campaign and to assure once again their commitment to the issue.

4. KEY RESULTS OF ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

The results and achievements of **“Strengthening Democratic Practices of Active Citizens Participation in Electoral Processes”** are significant thanks to the work of the local coalitions and the methodology applied during the process. Among the key results we can mention:

- ***Bringing up citizens concerns.***

Advocacy campaigns showed the importance of focusing on specific community issues of concern as a mean to overcome the mistrust associated with political parties. Focusing on specific issues and problems, the advocacy campaign implemented by each local coalition confirmed the importance of citizen participation before, during and after the elections. Through the methods used, citizens gained knowledge and skills on lobbying and advocacy techniques, and established partnerships and networks that helped them develop the campaign in their cities. The gained skills will help them to address community problems and issues in the future.

- ***Increase citizens’ and civil society organizations’ participation in electoral process.***

Local Coalitions in the four cities were actively engaged in each of advocacy campaign stages, to reach a wide number of supporters. The support was ensured thanks to the information of citizens and communities about the initiative. The awareness advocacy campaigns reached thousands of citizens, who were informed and involved in activities of the campaign.

- ***Strengthening local capacity of civil society organizations.***

The implemented approach helped strengthen the capacity of local civil society groups. Training programs in advocacy, lobbying, and monitoring techniques helped local coalitions to include citizens' concerns in the political agenda of the candidates. Strengthening of local capacities influenced the establishment of direct communication lines between the candidates for mayor and citizens.

- ***Cooperation among stakeholders to address priority issues.***

Local stakeholders had a close cooperation among them to address the issue. The approach introduced by Partners Albania (to work with candidates rather than against them) helped advocacy groups in drawing the attention of the candidates for mayor towards priority issues and problems in their communities.

5. LESSON LEARNED

The best practices resulting from the PA initiative to strengthen democratic values, during pre and post elections of 2011, are focused on a range of local activities. This experience showed that democratic values and practices are strengthened through:

- ***Use of elections to enhance advocacy capacity.***

Local elections serve as an important moment to enhance local capacities. This kind of endeavor emphasized one more time that citizens may mobilize themselves and other members of the community, cultivate relationships, gather information, identify resources, build public awareness of issues which they considerate as priority by influencing the political agenda of the candidates for mayors.

- ***Promotion of non-partisan activism on community issues.***

PA initiative confirmed the importance of non-partisan activism. Local coalitions, established by Partners Albania, designed and implemented an advocacy plan focusing on community-specific issues, and not on political believe and party affiliation. As a non-partisan group, the coalitions won credibility and legitimacy of the communities with whom and for whom they worked.

- ***Implementation of democratic mechanisms of citizen's participation to address local issues.***

Citizens learned to mobilize resources to build relationships and encourage comprehensive and coordinated action in the name of the issue. What was proved by the initiative is that elections could provide a mechanism to peacefully address local concerns.

- ***Organization of public events in the presence media to hold the candidates' responsibility and accountable towards citizens.***

Use of media as an important component of the cooperative advocacy approach that PA promotes helps to increase responsibility and accountability of the candidates for the pledges made during the elections.

6. ANNEXES

6.1. Local Campaign Korça

The city of Korça is one of the biggest cities of Albania. Korça has a population of around 86,000 inhabitants of whom 30% are composed of young people aged 15-25 years. Korca is a university city with around 300 students and 1500 high school students graduated each year. The most obvious and problematic issue for them is employment and participation in public, social, and cultural life. This fact directly affects their aspirations and preparations for the future and community development in a democratic society.

Young people are an important component of social development, a driving force in political and economic reforms in a country. Unfortunately, in Korça, institutions operate on the basis of their annual planning programs and services for young people but they still are not based on a genuine and structured youth strategy. Youth opinion is not heard, and their recommendations are not taken into consideration. The opportunity to engage young people in public life, through the process of strengthening their role in public life and governance, indicates the degree of democracy in institutions and public life in general.

Considering the situation, a group of youth NGOs as: Democracy in Action – DIA, Club 21, “Skills Of Life” - SOL Center, Community Advisory Group and Civil Society Development Centre (CSDC Korca), as well as students come together and established the Coalition of Youth Participation in Decision-Making. The aim of the coalition was to support youth and to address the issues concerning youth and students in the city of Korca, to strengthen youth voice to seek more accountable and transparent governance, and to increase their participation in decision making.

After discussions, the members of the coalition considered the lack of youth participation in decision – making processes as a main factor influencing the problems affecting young people in Korça. The design of a Youth Strategy was considered as a powerful tool that would increase youth participation in decision-making processes at Korça municipality to provide solutions for their problems. So, the advocacy initiative that was run under the slogan “Youth in decision-making, more opportunities, more solutions!” focused on drafting of the Youth Strategy in the city of Korca.

As a result of the advocacy and lobbying efforts during the electoral campaign, the coalition with support of other stakeholders in the city, succeeded to get the promise for the drafting, approval and implementation of a Youth Strategy in Korça from the two candidates for Mayor in Korça municipality: Mr. Niko Peleshi, and Mr. Andrea Mano.



The promise was formalized with Mr. Niko Peleshi, in a public meeting, in the presence of 80 young people and the media, in which a memorandum of understanding between him and the coalition was signed, to support the drafting and implementation of a Youth Local Strategy in Korca.

After the certification from CEC of Mr. Niko Peleshi, as the Mayor of Korca, the coalition send a letter to bring in his attention the promise made, and once again received his engagement toward the issue. A working group composed by members of the coalition and municipality staff in charge of youth issues will be established to prepare the Youth Strategy that will be getting the approval from the Mayor and the Municipal Council.

Të rinjtë në vendim-marrje më shumë mundësi, më shumë zgjidhje



Unë Mbështes Qeverisjen e Mirë

Partnerët-Shqipëri
Qendra për Ndryshim dhe Manaxhim Konfliktit

Koalicioni për Pjesëmarrjen e të Rinjve në Vendim-marrje
Korçë



During October – December 2011, the members of the coalition were supported by an expert of Partners Albania and designed the first draft of the strategy that will be discussed and finalized with the municipality staff and then will be presented for approval to the Municipal Council.

6.2. Local Campaign Pogradec

The city of Pogradec has a population of 45 thousand inhabitants, of whom around half of them are women and girls. Among the many problems faced by women and girls, unemployment ranks as the most obvious and disturbing one. This problem mostly affects the life of women that are head of families. They have to handle alone and without any support their life and that of their children. Currently, in the city of Pogradec there are 108 women, head of families, and all of them are capable and willing to work, but it is difficult for them to find a job that will ensure incomes to meet the living needs and requirements of their families.



Despite efforts made by various stakeholders to improve the lives of these women and their children, much remains to be done in order to provide stable jobs for these women in accordance with their capabilities and qualifications.

Considering this situation, the local NGOs in Pogradec, working on women and social issues, as: association 'Intellectual Woman of Progradec', association "Renewal", association "Women Integration" and association "Me, the Woman", come together and established the Coalition to Support the Families in Need, aiming to support the mothers-head of families, and to address the issue of their employment to improve the life of the families in need in the city of Pogradec.

During the electoral campaign, the coalition organized a series of meeting and public activities under the slogan "Support a mother - head of family, help a family!"

PUNËSIM DHE ZHVILLIM
Përkrah një nënë kryefamiljare,
Ndihamo një familje!

Unë Mbështes Qeverisjen e Mirë

Partnerët Shqipëri
Qendra për Ndryshim dhe Manaxhim Konflikti

Koalicioni për Mbështetjen e Familjeve në Nevojë
Pogradec

As a result of the advocacy and lobbying efforts during the electoral campaign, the coalition with the support of other stakeholders in the city succeeded in getting the promise for the creation of employment opportunities for mother-head of families from the two candidates for Mayors in Pogradec municipality: Mr. Artan Shkëmbi and Mr. Luan Topçiu. The promise was formalized, as the two candidates signed their pledges in individual meetings with the members of the coalition, where they committed themselves to:

1. Give priority to the employment of women – head of families in municipal enterprises, especially during the tourist season, when the number of seasonal workers increases.
2. Increase the role of the municipality as an intermediary with the private sector and the businesses that operate in Pogradec to provide job opportunities for mothers-head of families, in line with business needs and the qualifications of women.
3. The inclusion of women-head of families in the training and qualification courses to acquire skills in accordance with the requirements of the job market.

After the certification from CEC of Mr. Shkëmbi as the Mayor of Pogradec, some members of the coalition organized a meeting with the mayor in order to remind him of the promise made and signed, and once again received his engagement toward the issue.

From the meeting with the Mayor, they were informed that from the list of 108 unemployed women, head of families, 27 of them were employed part-time or full time by the municipality and private businesses.

6.3. Local Campaign Berat

Berati is one of the most oldest and picturesque towns in Albania, inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in July 2008. So called "The City of a one window over other" is obvious why this name, when seeing Mangalem neighborhood, built on a steep hill and the windows seem to be placed one over another. There are a considerable number of mosques, as: the King's Mosque (Xhamia Mbret, 1512), the Leaden Mosque (Xhamia e Plumbit, 1555) and Batchelor's Mosque (Xhamia e Beqarëve, 1827), this lastest with wonderful paintings on the outside walls. In Mangalem neighbourhood is the Mangalemi Hotel, builded in a wonderful Ottoman villa, the first hotel to be opened after the fall of communism. Another XVIII century Ottoman villa houses the Ethnographic Museum, along the narrow cobbled street leading up towards the citadel. Berati is dominated by its impressive Kalaja, the citadel built on ancient Illyrian foundations along a rocky ridge above the town. Most buildings inside the fortress were built during the XIV century and are preserved as cultural monuments. Over the years most deteriorated and now only some remain. The largest church is the Cathedral of Shen Maria (Saint Mary), rebuilt during 1797 and the most representative monument of post Byzantine architecture in Berati. It houses the Onufri National Museum in honor of Onufri, the famous XVI Century Albanian painter and houses a large collection of his beautiful frescoes by Onufri.

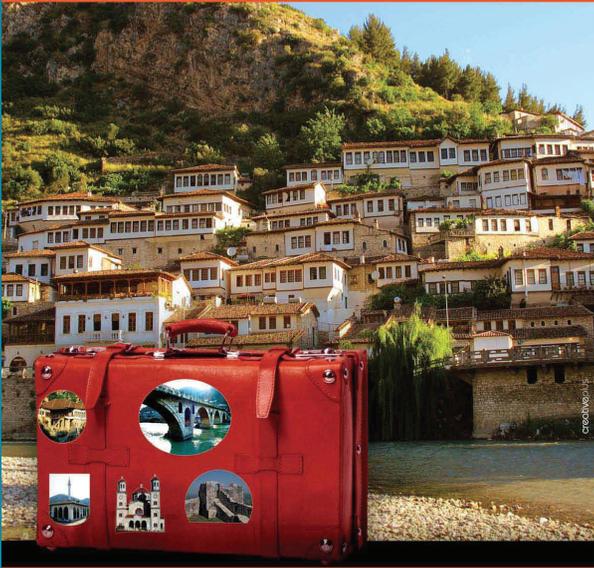
On the left east side of the Berat city, is located Tomorri Mountain, an excellent destination for summer and winter hikes. For its importance and beauty the Albanian Government declared Tomorr a National Park. Tomorr Mountain National Park covers an area of 4,000 hectares.

To be adding to this great historical and cultural treasure and nature beauty, is the canyon of river Osumi in Berat. The canion is one of the most spectacular natural attractions of Albania. The best way to explore it is in spring when the melting snow and the rain make it possible to navigate the entire length of the canyon with inflatable rafts. During this period, a number of high waterfalls gives the canyon a dream-like charm.

Despite natural resources, historic and cultural sites above mentioned, local government, business, arts and cultural institutions, and citizens of Berati, have not sufficiently exploited these resources, for a sustainable development of the city and his return into a major tourist destination. In the last two years the situation is somewhat changed in relation to the improvement of conditions for tourism and increased attention of all stakeholders, also in relation to the increased number of tourists. But considering the great opportunities of development to date remains much to do. This finding comes from city residents, intellectuals and civil society activists, whom with the support and facilitation of Partners-Albania from the end of 2010 were organized under the Coalition for

Tourism Development, to determine tourism as a development priority in the local development strategy and in the future mandate of local government 2011-2014. The coalition composed by several representatives of civil society organizations, as: Women's Center, Red Cross, Youth Parliament, the Counseling Center, Mental Health Center, Organization for Environmental Protection, UFO University, high school representatives and intellectuals from public institutions, was committed to address the issue of tourism in Berat, aiming its development and considering this as the main opportunity to ensure long-term development and welfare for the citizens of Berati.

TURIZMI, E ARDHMJA QË GARANTON MIRËQËNIE!



Unë Mbështes Qeverisjen e Mirë



Partnerët-Shqipëri
Qendra për Ndryshim dhe Manaxhim Konflikti

Koalicioni "Ndhimoni Fëmijët të Jetojnë si të tillë!
Elbasan

Mbështetur financiarisht nga Programi i Grantëve të Vogla i Komisionit për Demokraci i Ambasadës së SH.B.A.-së në Tiranë.

The coalition organized a series of meetings with stakeholders on development of tourism issues and meetings with the electoral staff of the candidates to discuss with them about the need for tourism development and its setting as a priority. Through statements and declarations, candidates committed themselves to be maximally engaged in their work for the tourism development and setting of a strategic priority. After the election, the coalition held a meeting with the Mayor, the reelected Mr. Fail Nasufi, to reconfirm its willingness related to the development of tourism through a strategic approach.

A number of positive developments occurred after that, mentioning the finalization of the local tourism strategy initiated more than a year ago with the participation of several local actors, among them some of the members of the Coalition for Tourism Development, as well as a conference with local and international tour operators to promote Berati, its values and its inclusion to tourist guides and of these countries. Coalition members remain committed to contribute with their support for tourism development. In the municipal plans for next year is the expansion of the tourism office, a promise given to the coalition, which will continue the follow up and monitoring.

6.4. Local Campaign Elbasan

Elbasani is a city located in central Albania, on the Shkumbin river in the district of Elbasan. It is one of the largest cities in Albania, with a population of 120.000 inhabitants. Industrial development began hundred years ago, and culminated during communism period. Now days, this isn't anymore a key development area which impact the local economy. Elbasani is also one of the major agriculture areas in the country. The city is well known for its great and old tradition in education and culture, as well for the natural resources.

Despite this, the city and the area in general face a lot of problems mostly related to economic development, environment pollution, and social problems of different target groups of the population.

The absence of a park or neighborhood parks where children could play freely during the day without being threatened by the risks of accidents, and an environment not over – polluted by tobacco smokes and omission of cars was some of the issues that coalition “ Help children to live as children” addressed during their advocacy campaign in Elbasan.

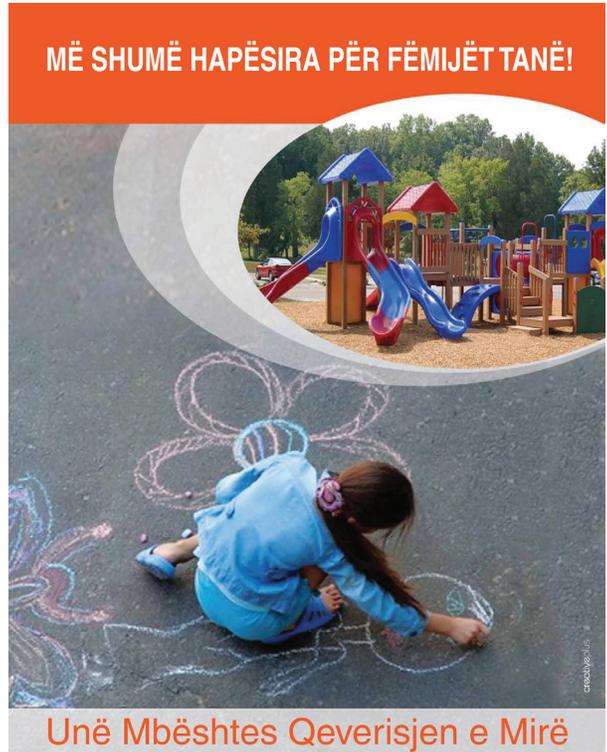
The coalition was composed by several NGO-s such as: “Other Vision”, “Elbasan Women Forum”, “In the Family, For the Family” association, “Terre des Hommes”, ect. During December 2010 – May 2011 a wide range of advocating activities were organized under the slogan “More spaces for our children!”. Round tables and meetings with representatives of educational directories, civil society



organizations, political parties, academic field actors, media and business were organized to raise public awareness on this issue among citizens and to gain support from them. As part of promotional campaign was also the press conference organized from the coalition with media and other stakeholders.

As a result of meetings held with candidates for mayor and their electoral staff, was provided the promise to work on this issue after the election and set it as a priority in the program of the next local governance mandate 2011 – 2014.

The coalition met the Mayor, Mr. Qazimi after his reelection to discuss on the possibilities of creating more spaces for children and their families. Considering the problems with the land property in some areas, the mayor and municipality expert's proposal was to create every year of their mandate, neighborhood parks with greenness and entertainment facilities. The coalition organized meetings with groups of citizens to increase awareness on the participatory budget process and to give their support on to this priority issue, when the municipal staff will organize such process in every neighborhood. The coalition continues its monitoring efforts for the cause.



Partnerët-Shqipëri
Qendra për Ndryshim dhe Menaxhim Konfliktik

Koalicioni "Ndihmoni Fëmijët të jetojnë si të tillë!"
Elbasan

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