



Zabljak, 2nd December 2023

OGP Support Unit

Mr. Rudi Borrmann, Deputy Director, OGP Local

Local Government Letter of Support: Call for new members to OGP Local 2023

As the President of the Municipality of Zabljak, I express my support and commitment to the application process for joining the OGP Local. I believe that membership in this initiative can contribute to better management, strengthening of accountability of local officials and improvement of public services, making us closer to the ultimate goal of creating a modern, service-oriented municipality, that enjoys the trust of its citizens, business and the civil society.

The strategic position of the MO Zabljak is in the heart of the northern region of Montenegro and implies a huge potential for attracting investment activities, especially in the tourism sector. Unique and diverse natural resources, in a small area, recommended Zabljak for the ecological capital of the first ecological country in the world, Montenegro. Thanks to its rich history, cultural heritage and natural beauty that surrounds it, Zabljak is recognized as the tourist center of Montenegro. Our municipality has all the predispositions thanks to which, with a clear vision and dedicated work, it can compete with prestigious European and world tourist centers.

In line with such position and resources, the team that is managing the municipality has a clear vision of further development of Zabljak, which is directed towards establishment of a digitally oriented modern public administration, and it is our goal to build strong communities through cooperation with the local population in a transparent and open manner.

With the aim of improving the overall development and better life of the local population, the local government has outlined clear directions for the improvement of services for citizens, the economy and civil society.

In pursuit of that aim, the municipality has the ambition to ensure a high level of citizen participation in the process of creating public policies and the decision-making process, as well as to strengthen partnership with civil society organizations. To do so, it is necessary to further improve the level of knowledge and awareness of the local population, especially young people, about the organization, decisions, competences, and way of functioning of local self-government.

Additionally, bearing in mind the tourist potential of the municipality and the fact that Zabljak is also the seat of the Durmitor National Park, the most visited national park in Montenegro, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List, our municipality is a favorite tourist destination at the

national and international level. The municipality must strengthen mechanisms and services to adequately respond to the demands and needs of a large number of tourists which counted 173,000 overnight stays this year.

In the previous period, through the pilot project, we developed a Local Action Plan, according to the OGP methodology, which includes several areas in which we want to improve the situation in accordance with the principles of good management, as follows:

- Simplified mechanism and better access to public data through the introduction of digital processes;
- Improvements in level of environmental protection, including through available economic functions and social impacts of the urban environment;
- Strengthening of the rational decision-making model, at the local governance level;
- Empowering women' entrepreneurship and achieving gender equality in decision-making
- Strengthening mechanisms for reporting on corruption and raising awareness of whistleblowers' protection;
- Mapping of illegal buildings on part of the territory of the municipality and developing mechanisms for addressing this problem, with the involvement of local communities.

During the said project, we also conducted the consultation process in the development of this plan in accordance with the OGP principles, including in terms of creating space for dialogue and cooperation and ensuring local ownership of the document.

Our Local Multisectoral Forum (MSF) called "Municipality of Zabljak and Society" was established according to the Open Call due to the need to ensure the quality of the process of preparation for membership in the OGP Local initiative and provides a structure for regular, two-way communication between the local administration and non-governmental actors. The MSF was formed with the task to achieve continuity in action that is in line with the needs of managing the OGP process. MSF leads the process of co-creating the local AP and cooperates with the local monitoring body that will independently assess the success of the OGP at the local level. The NGO Aktivna zona acts as a local monitoring body, with the aim of evaluating the process of co-creation, implementation of AP and promotion of OGP- related local initiatives.

The contact person, Milica Šljivančanin, who heads the Secretariat for Administration and Social Activities, will be coordinating activities related to the implementation of AP and fulfilling the obligations arising from membership.

The municipality of Zabljak has put in place the resources for the implementation of the Plan. It has 60 employees who are employed in 9 organizational units. Specifically, 20% of employees were engaged in the activities of the implementation of the OGP Action Plan. A team was formed in the Municipality and trained for the preparation and implementation of international projects, with a special focus on EU- funded projects. However, we recognize the need to further improve our knowledge and capacity in that area.

The Municipality of Zabljak is also promoting mechanisms for citizens' participation in the process of creating public policies. However, the degree of citizen participation is relatively low and there is a need for improvement, which can be solved by adopting and adapting several examples of positive practice available within the OGP community. We also recognize a need for better outreach to final beneficiaries and see the potential for that in agriculture and tourism. With the aim of improving entrepreneurship in the Municipality, we have opened new lines of support for female entrepreneurship and youth entrepreneurship. However, the Municipality recognizes that the percentage of participation of women and young people in these initiatives is low.

Bearing in mind that I have recently held the position of vice president of the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro, I will personally advocate for the promotion of the OPG principle at the level of all local self-governments in Montenegro. I see a space for the promotion of these principles through bilateral cooperation with sister cities of the municipality of Zabljak, but also through partnerships on projects that we implement with other municipalities.

Our goal is to make Zabljak a sustainable, inclusive municipality, with a focus on improving administrative and personnel capacities that will strengthen the open management system. Joining the OGP local initiative reflects our determination to work on these goals. The municipality of Zabljak recognizes that in the previous period they faced numerous challenges related to spatial planning and construction, which is the responsibility of the authorities at the central level. Therefore, I believe that the OGP can help the Municipality in improving coordination with the central authorities and thereby additionally protect the area and maintain the status of the ecological capital.

Our expectations are that through membership we will get access to the bases of knowledge, ideas, and successful examples, which we want to add to our results. Through networking with OGP members and practitioners, we aim to build and maintain relationships with those who share the same or similar interests and solve the same or similar challenges. Our motives additionally include increased visibility, access to opportunities and learning, to keep up with the latest trends, meet potential mentors, partners and gain access to the necessary resources that will encourage further development of open administration in Zabljak. We hope that with the provided resources and shared responsibilities, we will fulfill the motives of our application and implement our obligations, as one of the first Montenegrin municipalities to join this initiative.



Kindly,

Rados Zugic

President of MO Zabljak

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Local NGO Letter of Support: Call for new members to OGP Local 2023

We, non-governmental organizations from Zabljak, support the application of the Municipality of Zabljak for membership in the OGP Local initiative and welcome a proactive approach towards OGP values and principles, endorsed by the local administration.

Our specific objective in this context is to further build the trust and the relations with the local governance structures and to improve our participation in the creation of local policies. Namely, we see our role not as a sole spectator of the reform processes, but as one of the bearers of democracy in society and an important contributor to the process of creating an open, accessible, and inclusive local government we all thrive for. This was one of the main motives for us to participate in this process since its beginning.

Moreover, we firmly believe that efficient and responsible local self-government is key to the development of the local community. One of the foundations of such an approach builds upon good cooperation between the local government and NGOs, which is one of the key postulates and directions of the OGP local initiative. To be able to significantly contribute to OGP- related reforms at the local level, we need to improve our work as well and to learn from prominent experiences of other civil society actors involved in OGP process.

There are a small number of NGOs that actively participate in the life of the local community in the territory of the municipality of Zabljak, but their capacities are limited and conditioned by inadequate financial sustainability and the lack of strategic partnerships with other organizations. The low level of differentiation of NGOs in the areas covered by the OGP is particularly pronounced and prevents them from essentially contributing to decision-making in the mentioned areas and from monitoring and evaluating their execution and the impact that they have on citizens.

Consequently, the activities of the civil sector in Zabljak are not strategically organized and synchronized, but are rather implemented on an ad hoc basis, which reduces the synergistic effect and prevents civil activists and NGOs from exerting greater influence on the decisions and institutional practices of local administration.

On the other hand, participation in piloting the creation of the Local OGP Action Plan and work within the framework of the MSF has shown that the OGP model of cooperation between civil society and local administration, which is inclusive and transparent, is highly beneficial. Namely, it can help us to exert greater influence over decision-making and represent the interests and rights of our constituencies and the community at large.

Concretely, joined work on the development of the OGP plan, initiated at the OGP boot camp (added link), helped us to map the key problems and challenges and jointly formulate the following OGP commitments.

Participation in this process can also provide a clear and concrete framework for monitoring of the implementation of good governance standards in key areas of municipal development, including environmental protection, tourism, agriculture, spatial planning, and professionalization of local government. Through the monitoring of indicators and direct participation in monitoring bodies, we will be able to point out challenges and shortcomings in terms of good management and to directly propose and advocate the necessary changes and recommendations to improve the situation, together with other NGOs. This will strengthen our joint efforts in the decision-making process, but also strengthen their action in terms of monitoring the work of local government bodies.

Moreover, the OGP Local program will enable us to further improve our advocacy capacities and practice by networking with related organizations from other municipalities and countries, many of which have become recognized as reformers and co-creators of changes in their own local communities. The involvement of multiple stakeholders in OGP local initiative way help to ensure better collaboration with the academic community, which is currently underdeveloped and underutilized.

In the coming period, through participation in the implementation of the Local OGP Plan, we want to contribute to solving jointly identified obligations, which target several horizontal issues and challenges of importance for the local community. In this way, we will contribute to greater responsibility and transparency of the work of the municipality, with the inclusion of a wider community actors and stakeholder groups (citizens, civil society, private sector, etc.).

Local self-government will thereby gain the opportunity to strengthen citizens' trust in the work of its services, strengthen capacities for building consensus on issues of local importance, through higher quality decisions and stronger coordination in their execution. It will create a basis for future strategic partnerships, increase the openness and transparency of local administration and contribute to reducing the risk of corruption. Good practices and experiences gained through the OGP process can be multiplied in other areas that are not directly part of the OGP framework and thereby further improve the quality of management at the municipal level, and furthermore, the quality of life of citizens.

FILIP VICKOVIC

Filip Vickovic
Coordinator of the program of good governance
NGO Active Zone

Veljko Grbovic

Veljko Grbovic
President
Tourist and ecological organization "Durmitor" Zabljak



Slobodan Andjelic

Slobodan Andjelic
President



Association of Parents of Children and Youth with Developmental Disabilities *New Hope*

Ognjen Stijivancanin

Ognjen Stijivancanin
President
Association of Pensioners Zabljak

